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Historical Essay

THE DECLINE OF MERRY ENGLAND

CIVIL JOURNEY

By

STORM JAMESON



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Preface

EXCEPT for the *Apology* which comes first, and was written last of all, the pieces in this volume have appeared in periodicals or symposia; in one instance, as an introduction to someone else's book. They are here in chronological order, so that they mark the stages of a mind, my mind. That is perhaps not of much interest, but I should not offer these essays in criticism and the rest of it if I had not supposed they had some interest in themselves. One or two of them, naturally, are better worth reading than the others. A friendly critic might prefer to read the *Apology* and then to begin at the end.

Introduction and Apology for My Life

IT is given us once or twice in these later days to recover a moment from the past. Such a moment was mine last week when I walked into a restaurant I haven't entered since just before the War, when I was a student. I went upstairs, noting that they had changed the stair-carpets, and into the room where S. was waiting for me. He and I were at school together, and afterwards, when we were both students at King's College, we shared rooms in Herne Hill.

So now for a few hours we slipped back easily into the air of those days. It was not until afterwards that I realised how different the air is now. With S., and with one other person only, I could doubt everything, snatch up and shake every doctrine and belauded creed of our times to know whether the moths were in it. I could enter into speculations without the fear of coming up against a party wall. I could be as ribald as I pleased. I could set free every jeering devil of Yorkshire scepticism in the cells of my mind.

S. is the perpetual rebel. He is the man who risks everything in a revolution and is then shot by his own side because his mind refuses to go on repeating an I-believe. As we talked, and laughed at ourselves, certain young men slipped into the empty places on either side of us. If no one noticed them that is not to say they were not a thousand times more alive than anyone else in the room. That boy with the blunt nose, thatch of fair hair, and bluish eyes, has remarkably clear sight. He sees right through us, to the worm under our breast-bone. That other has kept his trick of waiting his turn to stutter a devastating comment. So you have come back at last? I said. No, the reply came, we never moved: it was you who slipped away.

That's true. As these are my witness I say that the boys and young men for whom society had no better use than to give them to be clumsily butchered, were each worth a streetful of the people of whom T. E. Lawrence wrote: 'the old men came out again and took from us our victory and re-made it in the likeness of the former world they knew.' Re-made it so miserably well that another generation has its throat against the butcher's knife.

S. said: 'Since I've been back in England this time I've met a lot of youngish writers, scientists, and what not, but I can't get them to talk to me about literature or science. They all want to talk

politics. That's all right, I understand that. But why do they all repeat the same jargon? Why do they go on telling me what Marx said in 1880, or Lenin said in 1920? They make me think of Sunday School brats with a —— text for —— good behaviour in their pockets.'

From the year we were fifteen, to the year when the War broke out—when none of us was over twenty or twenty-one—we were madly political. But we reacted violently against authority. If we accepted the ideas of socialism, we kept intact our curiosity and our freedom of thought. Nothing started in us our impulse to irreverence more swiftly than any attempt to come the All-knowing over us. I recall an evening when we were harangued for an hour by an official of the Independent Labour Party, who was very severe on us—yes, even in those days—as 'bourgeois intellectuals', though with half an eye you could see that he spent more at a meal on his food than we did in a week, and what is more he wore long Jaeger pants: we had caught sight of them when he sat and pulled at the knees of his trousers. We listened to him with patience—he was our invited guest for the evening. After his speech S. rose and asked a sensible question. Instead of replying directly to S., he spoke to the chairman. 'Just tell the questioner that when he has had as much experience as I have of the movement he'll know what

to take for granted. I've been a secretary of a Trades Council for eight years and in the I.L.P. for eighteen.'

'The speaker asks me to tell you——' our chairman began.

'Well, tell him I'm a black Protestant,' S. said, with his crowing laugh.

The young men who were my friends—and I, too—were all black Protestants. Those of us who survived 1914-1918 soon become uneasy in an atmosphere of reverent obedience to no matter what oracle. We stifle rude ironic laughter in our throats. The impulse to tweak the worshippers' elbows would get the better of us oftener than it does if we were not, alas, so few now.

Some years ago in a short book I complained against our better-known 'clerks' that they were indifferent to the dangers threatening us from within and from without. *Le trahison des clercs.* The complaint would be less just now. There is even something laughable in the eagerness with which writers sign manifestos and letters to the papers on subjects of which they are on the whole as ignorant as ever they were. But at least their indifference, their complacency, has been shaken. That is always to the good.

But what was it S. said—'Sunday School brats with a text for good behaviour in their pockets'?

The eagerness with which our younger 'clerks'

—and the best among them—rush into a uniform is disconcerting to the remnants of a generation which disliked uniforms, disliked giving implicit obedience, distrusted dogma. It is particularly disconcerting because it doesn't after all matter much what the old heavies do and don't do. But these younger writers, at school during the War, are the immediate future. They walk close on the heels of the ragged line we make, we others.

To tell you my mind about it—and speaking for my friends who were alive and are dead—I hold that a writer should not in any circumstances or for any cause surrender his duty to criticise and to enquire freely into the soundness of any idea, faith, doctrine, delivered to him by the mouth of authority. Of any authority. He must doubt everything that is offered to him to believe. And having believed must still keep his scepticism alive. He will need it—to see that his belief does not harden into dogma or his free agreement into a mere obedience. This doesn't mean that a writer who has chosen to act or work politically can refuse to take orders from the political leaders he has offered to help. He has surrendered to them in advance his freedom of action. But he has not surrendered his right to think and to judge freely the beliefs and motives of his leaders and the colour of the actions they bind on him. He may *suspend* his judgement. He may—he must, if he has signed himself into a

party—obey because without obedience there would be no party. But for him to put his free intelligence into the uniform of a private soldier is mere indulgence. He may surrender to a party, to be used, his time, his energy, his wits, but if he surrenders with them his writer's honesty he might as well hang himself. I would myself as soon be hanged as let another man think for me.

S. is speaking again. ‘It’s not a new thing for writers to fight for social justice. They’ve always done it. Remember the Master’—he meant Voltaire—‘But in the past they’ve always done it as free men, free-shooters, not as party members. Is Malraux a party member, do you know? There’s a man I respect. I’ll bet he doesn’t lick any leader’s boots.’

‘A certain arrogance, or a certain stiff-necked integrity—or, as often, both in the same man—has been the mark of every great—note the word—of every great writer who has fought, as a writer, for social justice. Think of R. H. Tawney.’

We drank, S. in cheap claret and I in water, to Tawney.

Surely it comes to it that at certain moments—and this one of them—all writers who can claim to be called ‘living’ must be political in a sense. They must have what the Quakers call a concern to understand what is happening in the world, and must engage themselves, in their writing, to promote

no comfortable lies, of the sort which people will pay well to be told rather than the truth at these times. A care for justice, a detestation of cruelty, are no more than one expects of an honest writer. He can sometimes—if he has taken care to be born into a more fortunate age—leave thinking directly of them. But not this day. Not this day, with us.

All the more is a writer who puts his mind and conscience in pawn a traitor. Complete liberty of thought is not—for the writer, as for any fully adult person—a luxury he must deny himself in war time. It is the bare condition of his existence, the only air he can breathe.

Is it only a reflection of the general uneasiness of society that during the past months so many voices have spoken of the dangers threatening literature? There is an odd feeling of insecurity and danger abroad. It must be a little the feeling of lettered men during the centuries when Rome was slowly foundering, its lights sinking, flaring up, never guttering quite out during that long night, the daylight coming back slowly. But, with a light here and there, it was still a darkness.

The barbarians are beginning to move again in Europe. Books are being burned, tongues stifled. Scholars, scientists, and writers, men of great worth and intellect, have been forced to beg the hospitality of other countries than their own. An English writer, seeing the plight of these others, may

wonder about his own future. Not every monastery was sacked and its books scattered during the dark ages—but a country is not a monastery.

There are, too, disrupting forces in society itself. (Note that the Roman Empire was foundering for a century and a half before the barbarians attacked.) These were discussed at a conference of the *Institut International de Coopération Intellectuelle* presided over by Paul Valéry, in July, 1937, a report of which has been published—*Le Destin Prochain des Lettres*. It is worth reading for other reasons than the interest of knowing the mind on this question of such men as Valéry, Romans, Madariaga, Hui-zanga, Duhamel, Forster. There were no German writers. The Italians found offensive the words *liberté de pensée* in the text of the resolution. On the whole, the balance inclined to pessimism in the minds of the French and the English—from which you may suppose either that we are more afraid or that we see more clearly. Despair sometimes clears the brain. ('Depend upon it, sir, when a man is going to be hanged in a fortnight it concentrates his mind wonderfully.') In his written contribution E. M. Forster said: '*je pense avec lui* (Valéry) que les jours de la littérature que nous avons aimée and pratiquée sont peut-être comptés.' Charles Morgan: '*La vie des Lettres dans un avenir immédiat dépend, comme de tous temps, du génie et de l'intégrité morale des individus. . . . Un artiste n'a rien à craindre que*

lui-même.' On which Dumont-Wilden, a Belgian, comments: '*J'ajouterai simplement: et de leur volonté de demeurer libres.*'

There is no reason to suppose that the impulses forcing men to write will perish with the death of a civilisation which could not keep itself alive. Nevertheless another Dark Age is not improbable. This uneasy thought turns some to the admirable stoicism of a Forster. It turned Ralph Fox, Julian Bell, Christopher St. John Sprigge to Spain, where they died. But if the enemy were nearer home? If the growing contempt for intellect—of which the signs, and the casualties, are too many, too bitter and saddening to be overlooked or to need setting down here—and the dangers threatening the future of letters, were our fault? A *trahison des clercs* as insidious as deadly?

This uneasiness seems to me to have been in my mind for more years than I have been familiar with it. It began with the doubts whether anything was worth writing, and with dryness. A moment in 1930 has impressed itself strongly on my memory. I was in Whitby. I had walked to the lovely village of Sandsend, farther up the coast, and gone into what we call the Coach Road, a charming tract of fields, trees and copses outside Mulgrave Woods. Here in one part the ground rises gently, with soft springy turf, and hawthorn bushes, and oaks. I sat down there, my back against a tree, and began

to think of the book I was writing. My mind was easily distracted by the scene, the thick golden light, the burden of bees in the hedge, the turf, which always seems to me here more than anywhere else in the world paradisially soft. We had had a long winter, cold, with much rain, and a late sudden spring. All spring was being crammed into these last days of May. The air between sky and turf was bright with it.

I brought my mind back to my book, to the point I had reached, and found, when I went forward a little, a dry country. I no longer wanted to finish the book. It did not seem to me worth while, nor did any of the other unwritten books which cluttered my mind.

Of no importance in itself—it is not, I mean, of any human importance whether I write or not—this first experience of dryness is important to me. It was the first step into a country of which I know now every dry stony stream, path between rocks, cracked earth where agony cannot sweat, even.

One learns much in this country. It is my ill fortune that I have never had time to live with my lesson until it could accommodate itself to my skeleton. Or my skeleton to it. I have been driven by my needs to dance like a bear—that is the right simile; I have a very clumsy mind—when I ought to have been quiet. Again—it is not important, except to me. I must, too, be honest and set down

that my needs have been aggravated by my mistakes. I should have managed better.

From this springs the division in my mind between the longing to withdraw into an anonymity with not even friends, and the contrary impulse—part of my inheritance from shrewd energetic grasping ancestors—to live completely in a world in which '*les lettres pures n'ont plus de place; elles ne peuvent plus respirer; elles manquent de l'atmosphère que leur fournissaient les classes érudites et cultivées.* *Cent raisons se présentent pour expliquer ce triste phénomène; pourtant, toutes ses causes se résument en un seul argument: le caractère barbare que prend la vie.*' In the event, I have lived in neither world. I have moved uneasily between them, a slave, a fool, without a home, without singleness of purpose, with only an involuntary honesty, with a deep consciousness of failure, of spiritual dishonesty, of—in a word—treachery—*le trahison d'un clerc.*

Plenty of people will say that the republic of letters—who invented that phrase? it is very appropriate now, when one sees what is the usual fate of republics—has signalled its danger too often in the past: there is no need to feel alarm now; we have heard it all before. This is true in a sense, but not in any useful sense. What is happening is that literature has entered very rapidly its industrial age. An immense semi-literate public—semi-

literate not because the persons composing it are inapt for letters, but because we do not train the senses of children, nor do we leave them alone: we blunt and misdirect them—asks for food it can digest without trouble, novels, romantic biographies, wonders of science. The supply is already beginning to choke the market. And the writers who supply it no longer have it all in their hands. The films, the wireless, are strong competitors. Writers, when they do not themselves go to Hollywood—even Aldous Huxley went there, I see—let themselves become infected by what is called ‘film technique’. The other day a well-known writer said to me, in a voice of chagrin: ‘My American agent has just written to say that my new novel isn’t *a natural for Hollywood*.’ What a phrase! Language can hardly escape with its life in these days.

All this takes place within the wider changes in society which have made an old countryman, with his rich instinctive knowledge, a foreigner to his grandson. The break with a living tradition is complete or nearly completed.

The industrial revolution in literature has had every consequence you would expect. You hear that such and such a writer is very pleasant, very fertile. You go to this pleasant-sounding place. Alas, the only thing you find there is a factory, blackening the earth with clouds of newspaper

articles, novels of two hundred thousand words, scenarios and the rest of it. Some of these factories covering far too much of England are in the finest modern style, excessively functional. Others will only make you sigh: they are so inefficient, weakly reluctant to go the whole modern hog. Here is a small ramshackle building labelled with my name —‘*It has no windows and the door swings.*’

The publishers, some eagerly, some with reluctance, put up factories of their own. If you will compare last Sunday’s publishers’ advertisements with the advertising of books before the war, you will see at a blow how modern commercial methods have seized publishers, rather—there are notable exceptions—than been seized by them.

It would not be true to say that the success of a novel like *The Citadel* is due to its being advertised as if it were a breakfast food or the new autumn styles. But it becomes the huge success it is by these ‘selling tactics’—to borrow the apt phrase from an allied trade. And by the existence of the vast public waiting passively to be stimulated and amused. The hugeness of the success now begins to squeeze other books out of the light. This is inevitable. A grocer will gladly order a new breakfast food which is, as they say, supported by a ‘selling campaign’. Booksellers are less single-minded, and have been heard grieving that they ‘might just as well keep Mr. Great-gut’s book

wrapped up ready to serve, since no one wants to try anything else.' Without grudging Mr. Great-gut the reward of months of hard work, one can feel sorry that he stands in the light of infant books which deserve better than to be overlaid. And feel, too, that though his industry and his merit are great they have been over-rewarded.

The future of letters in these conditions? In other industries the tendency is to concentrate effort on a few best-selling lines, cutting out the production of goods which have only a limited sale. The mass-production of a standardised article. This is obviously the way of economy and profit. Without supposing that the book trade will surrender easily to the rigours of commerce, it would be foolish not to see that this is the way it must go—even if it doesn't go the whole way. Publishers have so much to contend with, and will have more. Television will be added to the radio, and although apparently people can read (but what?) while they 'listen' to the *Grosse Fuge* on the wireless, they will find it impossible to listen *and* watch *and* read. Scylla and Charybdis, television and Hollywood, will snatch to death publishers soft-hearted enough to take chances—as many of them still do—on books which are *bonnes lettres* but not, dear me, not citadels of profit. The temptation to rely, in the unequal struggle, on Mr. Great-gut's arm (or whatever he writes with) will be too great.

Infants will be exposed. Soon their parents will smother them at birth.

In these conditions literature will exist on sufferance—a publisher will allow himself a flutter in letters now and then. Or on a private income. To-day I should advise any unknown writer who asked me for advice to begin with an income enough for his simplest needs, or to earn his living in some other way and write in his spare time.

There is, of course, another possible future for letters. That is to be trodden into the ground in a more rapid collapse of civilisation. Collapse would be accelerated by another world war. The memory of our literature and a few actual writings would survive. Later they would break again into men's minds, and in the meantime a new note would have been tried over in the growing light. There is a passage in a very short novel, *The World Ends*, by William Lamb—perhaps meant as a parable for our time. One of the survivors of a new deluge puts together what little he remembers of his reading. He calls it 'The Child's Book'.

'This thin thread, he thought ironically, may hold until daylight. Until the first warm breeze wakes the heart, with the first solitary bird-calls; the same note tried over and over, in the silence.'

I am writing this during the days—September 22 and 23—when peace and war lie on the balances. There is in my mind a memory—clear and small,

as though seen in a diminishing glass—of a page from the Egyptian Book of the Dead, which I was reading in the summer of 1917. The dead are being judged; the god stands holding in his hand a feather to be laid on the balance.

The feather lies light on the hand, now. Well, we shall know soon enough—in a day, a month, a year.

We may escape, and our children—who are more necessary to the future than we are. If we do, the statesmen may put on any laurels they find will fit. None of us will grudge them a leaf. We are a patient and forgiving race. Not from weakness, but from a kind of salty indifferent contempt.

A jingle which used to make me laugh when my Mother said it to us, when I was a child, has jumped into my mind.

*'This is the day, I say it with sorrow,
That we're all going to be
Blown up to-morrow.'*

Say we escape. The future of literature will have escaped the one danger it cannot avert by its own efforts. There is no ineluctable reason in nature why it should succumb to the others. One thing needful is that we clerks should take fresh vows of poverty, chastity, and disobedience. Since the War we have let ourselves get into soft ways. Agents and literary (sic) editors offer us easy money.

Even the managers of business firms hurry forward with large sums of money in their hands if we will write advertisements for them, or—the last degradation—sign ones they have written themselves. Writers who ought to think shame sell their chastity to the makers of patent foods and the rest of it. No doubt they are paid what it is worth.

Writers have put their standard of life up a great deal since the War. Too great a deal. To live with an anxious simplicity would suit us better. Either that, or to earn a living in some job which has nothing to do with literature. And write then only what it would choke us not to write.

If civilisation were to break down, it would be the duty of every writer to try to find shelter for himself. That is, for what—of far greater value than his life which is worth nothing in itself—he must keep alive in his own brain. It will seem to him when he dies that it has not been any use. That scarcely matters.

I should like to say something of my happiness. I am thankful that I was alive during the short exquisite flowering of life in the last year or two before the War. If you were not there, you cannot imagine what it was like. Never to have known anything about war, and so never to have feared. Indeed, to fear nothing except that with so many roads to our feet, we might not be able to walk on all. To walk? To run.

Children born during the War, or soon after it, are of an age with S. and the rest of us then. They seem very like us—far more like us than the generation in between. They are lively, sceptical, endlessly inquisitive. They are very fine, I think. So were my friends.

September 1938.

It seems that I was anxious about the future of the novel—as though the novel were a not very reputable old fellow to whom I was related—even earlier than I recall. This was written for The Nation and Athenaeum in 1929. It trails academic rags from my study of the history of Criticism, one of the subjects in which I was examined for a degree.

The Decline of Fiction

FICTION—the art of working in imagined material with imaginary characters—is under a cloud. A subtle air of disrespect attends its public appearances. Disrespect is perhaps too definite a word—it is more a faint coldness, the involuntary coldness one assumes towards a person of whom one has heard that he is probably up to no good. Never has the novel reached so high a level of technical perfection, never has it displayed more subtlety and acuteness of perception, more grace of manner, and never has it been so little regarded in the best company—except by novelists and reviewers of novels. Even so solid and imaginative a piece of work as *The Old Wives' Tale* would, if it were offered to-day, be less regarded than a good specimen of that biographical art which probes with new and more delicate instruments the intellectual and emotional motives of some man who actually lived, or the record of an actual experience set down with as much honesty and charm as the narrator can command, and invested with the enchanting melancholy of remembered things. It is as if we needed first to be assured that what we are reading was felt or

thought or lived in action by a real person, the narrator or another, before we can accord it the deepest attention and respect of which our minds are capable. What we care for in a book is no longer that it should be, as our fathers said, *true to life*, but that it should be the truth *of life*, or of a life.

This compulsion laid on the mind of the reader is laid also on the writer. No conscientious novelist to-day but reflects, a hundred times during the writing of a book into which he is putting all he knows, that it is after all hardly worth while. A distrust of himself—which is ultimately a distrust of the material in which he is working—comes over him. He feels that what he is making is not even an approximation to truth—that approximation made, with as much honesty and closeness as he can contrive, by the writer who writes down only what has actually happened to him. He feels an impulse to discard the falsifying medium of fiction, in order to write ‘directly’—that is, of himself, the only living creature about whom he knows even part of the truth. What restrains him from the attempt is probably not only that apathy which keeps us all doing what we have done before, but a profounder scepticism still, which murmurs that the ‘truth’ of the diarist, the biographer, and the writer of a war book, is itself only an approximation. Scepticism, once let loose, is a dry rot that nothing arrests.

The compulsion to ‘tell the truth’ remains. The more sensitive and, if the phrase be allowed, more truly creative a mind, the more fastidiously it turns from the distorting medium of fiction. It shrinks from a method that, it is persuaded, will diffuse its energy and blunt its delicacy of apprehension. Two of the finest and most creative of modern minds—Mr. Edmund Blunden and Mr. Siegfried Sassoon—do not write ‘fiction.’ They write, with delicacy and assurance, of what actually was. *The Memoirs of a Fox-hunting Man* is an attempt to portray truthfully one aspect of a young man’s life, as *Undertones of War* is an attempt to tell the truth of one man’s war.

The same compulsion manifests itself in what is properly fiction. ‘Let us tell the truth’ is a battle cry as old, in our memory, as the Naturalists, those austere collectors of human documents. The impulse they gave to the novel has not died away: it continues to produce every year a few raw works, dripping with sweat and mud, which bear every mark of having come from the bottom of a well. In these writers the compulsion has got no further than a determination to show life up. In other—and equally solemn—novelists it takes other forms. Mr. Huxley—of whom it is difficult to avoid the faint suspicion that perhaps he once *knew* a Naturalist—fills his novels with discussions of contemporary speculations in science and philosophy: Mr. D. H.

Lawrence, with the aid of psychoanalysis, displays an unnerving familiarity with his own unconscious and by analogy with that of his characters. It is idle but interesting to compare Mr. Lawrence with Proust, in whom the compulsion to tell the whole truth was stronger than in any other of those modern writers who have been faithful (notwithstanding the atmosphere of suspicion in which it moves) to the art of fiction. The one so drawn towards the object, whether the object be a young woman's yellow stockings, a meadow in June, or the phantasies of his own unconscious; the other drawing everything into relation with the subject, with himself, there to be transmuted into as strong and delicate a web of thought and feeling as ever human spider contrived: the one working of necessity in space, the other in time: alike in one thing only—the need, which they share with Mr. Huxley and novelists of lesser genius, to be 'honest,' to get at the truth of life, to avoid, so far as they may, the disgrace attaching to what is merely made-up.

Examples might be multiplied, but none of them, however striking, has the force and validity of that intangible feeling which assures every one of us, at moments or all the time, that the best work of the best modern novelist is not in so high a class as—say—*Undertones of War*. This feeling exists, and is undefeatable by argument. It creates

a scepticism regarding mere fiction. It exerts a compulsion.

This compulsion shows itself in other ways. As, for example, in the welcome accorded by some acute minds to the conclusions of Professor Pavlov, the Russian physiologist. The scientific value of his deductions does not here concern us: what is significant is their effect on the literary mind. The reviewer of the *Times Literary Supplement* says of him: 'Professor Pavlov is led . . . to express the opinion that however elaborate or complex cerebration may be, it is in essence compounded of successions of conditioned reflexes, that is, of acquired, usually temporary, and certainly modifiable interconnections of one neuronic system with another. He can trace in the brain no "higher function," no other function than this.' This conclusion, which, when I arrived at it myself in Professor Pavlov's book, filled me with horror, fills with admiration a man who is doubtless better equipped than myself to understand the book, and who must therefore be giving an accurate account of it. That it does so is another, and an unpleasant, symptom of the working among us of that hostility to 'the imagined thing' which in more sensitive minds keeps a Blunden and a Sassoon tied to the actual.

Why? Why does a theory which reduces the finest products of the creative brain to a 'nothing'

but' arouse excited pleasure in certain minds? Why do we, even when we write it, feel a little ashamed of fiction, as of being in the company of a rather vulgar person whom we do not care to introduce to our friends?

The writer who is dealing with a real experience has a clear advantage over the novelist dealing in pretended experiences, in so far as he is accorded in advance the belief which the other has to evoke. That does not explain why we are now more ready to accord respect and admiration to Mr. Blunden than—say—to Mr. Galsworthy. Nor why we feel that we would rather have written *Undertones of War* than *The Man of Property*. An obvious answer is that we are still suffering from the shock of the War. We are like children who have been undeceived about certain legends in which we firmly believed. We cry: 'Away with fairy tales, away with semblances. Give us the truth.'

It is possible. But that can at best be only half the answer. Since it is at least as obvious that we do not now begin to despise, because they are not records of actual experience, *Hamlet* or the *Agamemnon*.

If we reject semblances and demand reality, we are compelled to remind ourselves of Schiller's defence of it. 'The greatest stupidity and the highest understanding have herein a certain affinity with each other, that they both seek the *real* and are both quite insensitive to mere semblance . . . in

a word, foolishness cannot soar above reality and intelligence cannot remain below truth.' Is this a fair statement of our preference for the 'truth of life'? Wait. 'Inasmuch, then, as need for reality and devotion to the real are merely products of a human defect, indifference to reality and interest in semblance represent a true progress for humanity and a decisive step towards culture.' Now where are you?—unless at the juncture of two 'semblances,' the one we are given in modern fiction and of which we now doubt the value and respectability, and another, which we are not being given in it, and which it would be more useful to speak of as *symbol* rather than as *semblance*.

We feel—and with what just passion—that *Undertones of War* is more worth while than any modern novel. But do we feel that it is more worth while than the *Agamemnon*? We prefer actuality to let's-pretend, but can we prefer it to a work in which the characters are symbols of an otherwise unimpartable reality?—images of a reality which cannot get itself expressed in any other form?

It is possible that fiction, the novel as we know it, can never become the vehicle for this higher reality, which sleeps in all our minds and can be evoked for us only in the form of symbols. It can perhaps concern itself only with being, and never with becoming. If this is true, then the modern temper (which fulfils itself more fully and with

more assurance in modern physics than in the modern novel) will force us to leave the novel behind. More and more the finest minds will reject fiction, and will write directly of what they have felt and known. Until one of them, by virtue of who knows what talisman, will stumble upon the hidden door and, opening it, let out the future.

1929.

In February 1932 I went to Berlin and was there during the March election for the President, in which socialists and Social Democrats worked for the return of Hindenburg because they believed him when he said ‘You can trust me’. I won’t pretend that I knew then that Hitler would succeed. I believed he wouldn’t. For one thing, so many of my friends were cultured liberals. For another I was staying in a boarding-house—and meeting the hostess and the other guests at meals—where everybody but an ignorant elderly woman was contemptuous of him. And they were all Nationalists of one sort or another. I remember our hostess, a Saxon woman of sergeant-major proportions, striking her mouth with her hand and exclaiming: ‘If Hitler should win, that woman’—she meant the Nazi—‘never eats in my house again!’ I hope that Fraulein G. did not avenge the insults to her Führer to which she was forced to listen during this time. I remember, too, bitter quarrels between social democrats and communists. And a communist explaining to me, with passionate contempt for my doubts, that he had been working for Hitler because it was the quickest way to revolution. He got his revolution a year later, but it did him no good.

I was mistaken, too, in thinking that the Germans are learning to laugh at themselves. They take themselves still with a deadly seriousness which is as much the enemy of reason as of tranquillity.

City to Let—Berlin 1932

IT is the fourth night of the Six-Day-Race in the Sportpalast. From where I am sitting I look directly down into the bunks of the riders. No. 7, whose name is either Schön or Goebel, has just come in. He crouches to look at the front wheel of his bicycle before handing it over to his mechanic, who begins rapidly to change the tyre. Schön drops full length on his bunk. His trainer oils his hands, pulls down the black shorts a few inches, and massages his stomach. He talks to Schön, who is bored or sulky, closes his eyes and won't answer. On the track the riders go round at a moderate speed. It is only nine o'clock and the fun has not begun. The cubicle to the left of Schön's is occupied by an Italian, sitting propped up on his bunk with a cup of soup. Schön's trainer has begun on his legs, kneading, stroking. After ten minutes or so of this he pulls the curtain across the front of the bunk, goes away to one of the buffets and comes back with a plate of food. He speaks to Schön over the top of the curtain and drags it back. Schön is not hungry. He waves the food pettishly aside, pulls the rug up to his

chin, and apparently falls asleep. His body makes scarcely any show under the rug. He looks dead.

The atmosphere is already stifling. The waiters scurrying between the buffets and the track-side tables are damp and indefatigable. Some of the spectators are dining here, others are satisfied with a glass or two of beer, some of them will stay until breakfast-time, eat it here, and go off to their offices. The packed crowds in the circle and the gallery have brought food in string bags, or they can buy hot sausages, beer, coffee, and ice-cream sodas from the open-all-night refreshment rooms. A terrific orchestra brays unceasingly. When it crashes into a popular song the words are flung on a screen swung from the roof, so that the audience can amuse itself while it waits for the excitement to warm up.

*Einmal is keinmal, denn trink' mit mir
Und morgen ist alles vorbei.*

Something is happening. The groups of reporters, diners, waiters, and officials inside the track climb on chairs. Schön is wakened up and pushed on to his machine. As soon as he is on the track his partner, Goebel, falls out and takes his turn in the still warm bunk. There is a general post among the thirteen competing teams. The first special sprint of the evening has begun. The competitors pedal furiously. A man behind the

judges' box holds up a number, so that the robot-men know which round they are finishing. The crowd is becoming wildly excited. Schön is a favourite and they shout encouragements. When he fails a hurricane of cat-calls assails him from all sides. He ducks his head contemptuously. His girl, who is sitting on the roof of his cubicle with two of his friends, adopts an attitude of defiant anguish. The next time he wins. Terrific shouting. Goebel stands up and goes off to take his place, since the speed must be kept up now until breakfast-time: after that the place empties, the waiters fall asleep, and the riders pedal round as slowly as possible, like sleepy automatons. Schön comes in and drops on to the bunk. Neither his girl nor his friends dare to speak to him. He eats a little and goes off again. The heat and the noise have become unbearable. We force our way through. Outside the icy cold drives the breath back down your throat. Though it is one o'clock this end of the town shows few signs of going to bed. The buses are full. So are the cabarets in Kurfürstendamm.

This interminable street has become fashionable since the War. Yet even here a third of the shops are to let. The most conspicuous object in any of these streets is the To Let signs. Empty gaping windows, like missing teeth, everywhere, even in Unter den Linden. That once so lordly street has

now a kind of magnificent shabbiness. It is pleasanter so, especially at night. By comparison with London Berlin is dimly lighted. The effects are admirable: in the semi-darkness even the Brandenburger Tor becomes shadowy and beautiful.

A number of shops and small restaurants have pasted up large yellow notices that here the prices have been reduced by decree. It is only officially true. Yet prices are low everywhere. Clothes are cheap, shoes are amazingly so, food is not so cheap, but the level of prices is nevertheless lower than in England. If they were not, the situation of the middle-classes would be intolerable. Salaries have been cut not once but several times, staffs are reduced to the minimum. Parents who have half-starved themselves to send a clever son to the university can do nothing for him at the end of his course. They call the universities *Wartehalle für Unbeschäftigte*, waiting-rooms for the workless. The lecture rooms at Berlin University are so overcrowded that students stake out their claims to standing-room by pinning a visiting card or pieces of paper on the floor. Fully-trained young doctors are glad to earn a few marks addressing envelopes. It is from among these, and from the small, ruined shopkeepers, and from the women, that Hitler draws his support. *Adolf Hitler will Deutschland befreien!*

The thinness of the traffic in the main streets is

striking. There are very few private cars about. Rows of taxis wait hungrily in the side-streets. In private conversation you get a feeling of strain and tension but rarely of hopelessness. When a German loses hope completely he commits suicide. Until then he fights. His nervous self-respect draws the line at rags and dirt. In the streets north and south-east of Alexanderplatz the unemployed almost outnumber the employed. Face after face here has the waxen colour of semi-starvation, but there are no dirty children and these men who drift past, with hands tucked in their belts, are pitifully neat. Down here the strain touches breaking-point. There are three scales of unemployment pay, and the third and last, which a man reaches in his second year out of work, is sheer misery. In this lowest circle a man with a wife and eight children may draw fifty shillings *the month*. Even with the cards that enable him to buy his food cheaper this is not life. A few evenings ago an old man knocked at the door of a flat in a good building, and asked shamefacedly for a pfennig. At most of the flats he would have been lucky to get exactly that. A few months earlier he had lost his last chance of work because he could not raise anywhere the 15/- to buy a waiter's third-hand dress coat. He did not understand how this could have happened to him. He cried.

Another corner of the scene. A completely new

Berlin has sprung up since the War. At Tempel Hof, next the aerodrome, what used to be the military review grounds is now a finely-planned estate of new houses, charming and dignified. The new German architecture has every quality the old lacked, dignity, fineness, and simplicity. These houses with their colour-washed walls are delicious.

One evening I am invited to a house in the Dahlem district. My host is a rich man and his house a perfect example of the new simplicity: the four living-rooms form a square of communicating rooms, ample, solid, bare, warmed, with wide sun-windows: sun balcony, a long nursery divided in half at night by a sliding wall: admirable modern furniture. The talk is entirely of politics. Our host does not believe that Hitler will come to anything. He waves away the very idea. One of his friends, a wealthy industrialist, who has just quoted Shakespeare to support an argument, is less certain. So is yet another, a banker. So is the quiet-voiced American journalist. The banker has a face that laughs by itself. Twirling his fingers, he repeats: ‘Either we shall be all right, or we shall go to nothing again. What does talking matter? What do Hitler, Hugenberg, Hindenburg matter?’ And he tells the story of a millionaire friend of his, who has been hoarding gold in half a dozen capital cities and cannot get at any of it. *Was für ein System!*

The next evening, at the same time, I am sitting in the barely furnished room of a tiny new flat in the north of Berlin. It is one in a vast block, and the block is one of many. Huge modern structures, built to let in light and sun, centrally heated, with electric light and modern kitchens, they were intended for the workers, but the rents, low as they are, are beyond any but privileged classes of workers, and the bourgeois are succeeding to this modern (standardised) heaven. Goodness knows how many blocks of these extraordinarily pleasant modern flats have been built in Germany since 1926. ‘On *our* money,’ my English companion says dourly. No doubt—but what did he expect the Reich to do with the loans? Put them in the bank? At least they have achieved something enduring. Our host this evening is a Communist, a composer. That is to say, he is a fanatic of a modern religion which is hindered from firing Europe less by its enemies than by its own misreading of human nature, English human nature in particular. He and his wife are very young, very charming, and poor. We talk a little about Dolmetsch and more about the General Strike against Fascism. . . .

This morning, in a bitter wind, the flower-sellers in the squares have rolled the bunches of tulips and narcissi in paper. The snowdrops and violets and the yellow feathery mimosa seem not

to mind the cold. These stalls set thickly with Spring flowers are the loveliest sight in Berlin. . . .

Of all European cities this one knows best how to amuse itself cheaply. The cultivated Berliner pretends to laugh at Haus Vaterland, but he is secretly proud of it, and why should he not be? There is nothing like it anywhere else. Imagine a building half the size of Selfridge's. You go in, pay your one mark, which includes the cloakroom fee, and are made free of some ten restaurants, of as many different nationalities. The Turkish room is dim and mysterious, with hall-marked Turks to serve your coffee. In London the police would insist on turning the lights up. The Wild West bar is a copy of a log cabin, with a cow-boy orchestra for the dancers. Most of the other rooms offer you the illusion of sitting in a restaurant which overlooks a stretch of sunlit country. In the Austrian room Vienna and the Danube lie far below. This is a good illusion. Once, in 1929, I sat in a restaurant on the Kahlenberg, in the evening of a hot burnt-up day, and looked at this precise and magical scene. The Rhein Terrasse has vines, the stumps of castles, and that river which has become a German symbol. We choose the Bavarian restaurant and a deafening band, and order sausages, *sauerkohl*, and beer. I don't really enjoy German sausages—they are too solid—beer, or cabbage cooked in vinegar, but everyone is so happy that

I become exhilarated myself. Enthusiasm touches its peak when the prospect at the end of the room is darkened by a storm. The lightning flashes and thunder rolls tremendously about the hills; then all slowly clears, the sun shines again, in the valley the lake gleams, and the birds (and the waitresses) begin singing. Every one of these large rooms is crowded. The staggering thoroughness of the decorations is less remarkable to an Englishman than the fact that for their two marks' entrance fee the young clerk and his girl, the elderly official and his fat wife, can wander over the whole vast building, can dance, can sit in the lap of comfort all night until early morning in front of the same glass of beer, wine, or orangeade, or the same cup of coffee. Berlin has not yet been commercialised, thank God. . . .

The Bock-Bier-Fest in Neue Welt is a less respectable affair, and not in the least luxurious, but there is the same crowd, sitting close together over plates of cheap food, toasting each other in the new beer, dancing in one of three large halls, singing *Isabella, Du schöne Isabella* to drown the band, shooting the chute on its behind, giggling at the horrific German humour of the wall-paintings, happy in the feeling that it still has a job and a little money to spend. I had almost forgotten the Love Boat. . . . As we walk away, my German friend recalls casually that a few Sundays ago

Nazis and Communists staged a bloody fight in this street. . . .

Contrasts. Perhaps Horcher's is the best restaurant in Europe. This small room with the shabby olive-green panelling has forgotten more princes and personages than the other 'best' restaurants can remember. Herr Horcher is a small quiet man, with faded blue eyes. His dining-room holds only forty people and to-day the only foreigners are our host, who is an American, and ourselves. I watch an elaborate sauce being made for the venison. Double cream, an egg yolk, brandy, and a great deal of rich gravy. The waiter stirs them together in a shallow dish over the flame, arranges in it the slices of venison, and watches them simmer gently. The vegetables are asparagus tips, *kohl-rabi* cooked with cream, and potatoes nearly dissolving in butter. I feel ashamed, but I eat it. Perhaps I shall never be in Horcher's again. Not, certainly, at my own charges. Our host tries to define the crisis for us by a quotation: 'They say here: In Germany things are serious but not catastrophic; in Austria they are catastrophic but they are not serious.'

In the evening I let myself be persuaded to visit El Dorado. I always supposed that these places were created and kept up solely for foreign consumption. But I am the only foreigner in the place. The people at the other small tables round

the dancing floor are all extremely respectable Germans—from the provinces, my German friend says (he calls provincials ‘negroes’). With eyes starting out of their heads they sit and watch men dressed as women dancing solemnly together. At half-past eleven the cabaret begins. The first male dancer is large and yellow-haired, the image of a plump blonde lady, wearing a low-cut evening gown of blue satin, with a great many pearls. The second is nearly recognisable as a man, in spite of his gown. The third is young, slim, and all but naked. He really dances very well. By this time my boredom has become so acute that I insist on going home. ‘Oh, but you haven’t seen the other one, where the women wear men’s clothes.’ I lack the persistence of these Germans. Nothing would induce me to look at another. . . .

Horcher’s the best restaurant, and the Jockey the pleasantest *nachtlokal* in Germany. Two low, narrow rooms, a piano played quietly and endlessly by Ernst Engel—and Herr Kaufmann himself. No entrance fee. No charges beyond your food and drink—you may choose to sit all night from half-past ten to three over a cup of coffee. Under the impression that we are Americans, Herr Engel plays a bar of *Maryland*. Corrected, he turns it into *Rule Britannia*. Forgiving of him—all things considered. . . . He plays on from one thing to another, from Gershwin to Mozart. Herr Kaufmann

never sits down, carrying that smile from table to table all the time. What happens, when he dies, to a man whose genius lies precisely in being able to peel off a self and leave it with each person to whom he speaks? The last peels off as he dies, leaving—nothing? Or leaving something rudimentary, to begin again? . . . An exquisite Malayan girl, very young and thin, sings—in Malayan, in German, then in something we recognise at last as English. The native song sounds charming—the English has a chorus about ‘that Swanee shuffle.’ It is much applauded. Herr Kaufmann in my ear: ‘She wants to go on the films.’ Perhaps the elderly Jew now talking to her can help. She smiles, and smiles. . . .

I think the middle-classes are much better catered for here than in London. The music halls are not up to Coliseum standard. Every other turn is acrobatic and the rest have not very much bite. The impression left—by the Winter Garden and the Scala—that the post-war Berliner is a simple-minded Victorian—has to be corrected, though. In the afternoon cabarets the turns are introduced by a *compère*. His remarks are both pointed and allusive, and the audience—middle-aged and middle-class—takes them all. The songs are Marie Lloyd on Saturday night, in Liverpool, in Grand National week. Everybody is very happy. The tables are not too close together, the setting is modern and

intimate, the coffee and cakes for which they have paid 1 mark 50 (and that is every penny they have paid) are excellent. Nothing so amusing, comfortable, or so *friendly*, exists in London, at any price. The place is quite full. . . . So is the Opera House, on just an ordinary night. . . . So is Reinhardt's theatre, where every trick of lighting and stage machinery is played to turn *The Tales of Hoffmann* into a gorgeous spectacle. There was a time, just before the War, when Reinhardt was spoken of as part of the new movement in the theatre. The years have passed, leaving him showing off his marvellous tricks in a void. This year something really new is going on in a tiny theatre on Unter den Linden. Calling themselves Truppe 1931, a group of young out-of-work actors have written their own play, *Die Mausefalle* (after the play in *Hamlet*), which they act with amazing vigour and enjoyment in front of a plain back-drop, without properties. It is actually about the Marxian theory of values—which these actors in their shabby dresses contrive to make dramatic, exciting, and pertinent. This is the theatre in its most significant aspect, the miming of new forms of thought. *Die Mausefalle* has been running for months. . . .

Impossible to live in Germany for a day and not realise that one subject occupies the minds of Germans to the exclusion of all others. Not reparations—that has become almost an academic

question, which can now be left to settle itself. But here they think, talk, eat, and drink politics. The very children in the High School are politicians. In the universities the life of a professor with unpopular political views is made impossible by his students and colleagues. They fight. One day a Communist schoolboy is fatally wounded by Nazi youths. The following evening a workman of moderate opinions is shot dead by Communists. At dinner I sit next to a gently-smiling old lady who says she is a follower of Hitler, and a member of the party. ‘You Hitlerites have a song,’ I say diffidently, ‘which begins something like: “How fine to see the blood of the Jews spurting under the knife—*wann Judenblut vom Messer spritzt!*”’ Her face remains placid, smiling. ‘Yes,’ she agrees, reflectively: ‘Yes. . . . It is a song. Like other songs.’ A little doubtfully I suggest that it is not very like other songs known to me. ‘No?’—a gleam of satisfaction comes in her eyes—‘more lordly, no doubt.’ Much more lordly. . . .

On Sunday morning there is a meeting of the Stahlhelm, in the Sportpalast, where they held the Six-Day-Race—it is a memorial service for the War dead. The street outside is plastered with yellow bills giving the names (with the date) of persons who have been murdered by Nazis during the past year. . . . The service is dull and declamatory.

Yesterday, also in the Sportpalast, an enormous

demonstration for Hitler. This extraordinary man, who looks like Charlie Chaplin in one of his tragic moments, this ‘unknown lance-corporal of the War,’ owes his success to Germany’s years of weakness—he offers what the psychologists call a ‘wish-fulfilment.’ He is filling a new generation with ideas of Germany’s mission. . . . At this meeting his colleague Goebbels makes a terrific speech. His enemies say that Goebbels is a Jew. This he denies. When he married, the report that his wife was Jewish stung him into offering to show her to all honest enquirers. In England he would scarcely have survived the burst of laughter. This country badly needs a Low.

Another evening, in the same gaunt shabby building, the Communist rally—over ten thousand shabby men and women, thin children with banners, stolid faces of workmen, faces of fanatics, of tired anxious women. Young, pinched faces. The Communists have a poet who is forbidden by the police to recite his poems. His wife reads them and the whole meeting mutters, a low excited sound, breaking in cries. Songs. A long earnest speech, vehement and formless. At intervals the speaker demands: ‘And who did this to you?’ A roar. ‘*Polizei!*’ Outside, hand-linked lines of the *polizei* break the issuing crowds up into twos and threes. Mounted police. A wind like a flail. A beggar. Blown paper—*Vote for Hindenburg*. A child crying.

This morning the cold has become intense again. To escape it we go into the Zeughaus and stare at guns and tattered regimental banners. In front of a display of shells my companion says: ‘That’s the fellow that used to frighten me out of my skin. It made a noise like an express train.’ I look up at the shabby flags and think that the greatest day in history will be the one on which they burn the lot.

The Tomb of the Unknown Soldier is close by, in Unter den Linden. It is more impressive than the others I have seen—an old guard-house, open to the sky, the Tomb itself a great square of black stone, with the date. Nothing else, except the wreaths, and two slender bronze pillars supporting thin blown flames. A few flakes of snow drift down into the Tomb. . . .

I am conscious all the time of an older Germany surviving strongly under the new, caring intensely for music, for friendship, and completely indifferent to lesser values. Even the madness of Hitlerism has a root in the romanticism of that enduring Germany. Sometimes a young man says: ‘We Germans have no longer a past, we have now only a future to believe in.’ The very violence of the repudiation betrays them. The youngest of all are the angriest. ‘*We* didn’t sign the Treaty,’ a boy of thirteen said furiously. He flung his head back and glared at me. ‘He’s only been like this since

he passed into High School,' his mother sighed: 'I try to teach him better. . . .' But what did we expect?

The feeling of uncertainty has its roots in a past no older than the memory of a child. A phrase occurs again and again, in casual talk—'That was during the Inflation. . . .' To understand post-war Germany even a little one must think less of the grimacing mask of Hitler and more of German men and women going about their business with their old steadfastness, of workless men brushing their shabby jackets and cheap worn shoes, of the young stiffening themselves to believe in a future. All these millions of patient, essentially simple people, are waiting on the next turn of the wheel. It may bring recovery. But equally it can bring a not unimaginable ruin—a ruin too easily imagined. The question of this year, as of last—'What is going to happen?' And the answer—'No one knows.' The one certain thing is that nothing short of another collapse can keep these people from recovering. They are too tough to be finished by anything less than violence or catastrophe. Also, they are learning to laugh at themselves.

I was invited to lecture on The Craft of the Novelist—I cannot remember now where I gave the lecture, whether the audience listened, or whether they were as bored as they might well have been by the first attempt I made to think critically about novel-writing. This essay is full of exemplary notions. In a deal of hay you may, however, prick your finger on a needle or two.

I see that the lasting obsession of my life since the War—the fear of another—crept into it. The fear that another will kill my son as brutally and uselessly as the last killed my brother in his nineteenth year. It gets, you see, even into an essay on the novel.

The Craft of the Novelist

It is difficult to write about the craft of the novelist without giving the impression that it is something which can be learned, in the sense that you can learn to play a game or fence. Yet this perhaps is not such a bad analogy, since you cannot fence without teaching your muscles nor write novels without training your mind. In the first case your mind teaches control to your muscles, and in the second it teaches itself—which is more difficult. It is difficult because what you have to learn is not how to use words for their own sake, nor how to invent a plot or describe a character. All these things may be useful, but they are not essential. The only essential thing is that your mind should become more sensitive to experience. You must be able to feel and to think honestly before you are fit to write at all, and the finest technical training in the world cannot squeeze a good novel from cheap easy emotions and dishonest thinking.

This is not something so obvious that it was not worth mentioning. It is so little obvious that every season sees the appearance, amid bursts of applause, of faked masterpieces, in which facile emotions and

confused dishonest thinking are passed off for real, with the utmost self-assurance. Moreover, critics mislead you—I have done it myself—by writing about the beauty of So-and-so's style or the cleverness of his construction as if these were something apart from the content of the book, and not, as they are, wholly determined from within. In a final analysis all art, like any other human activity, is the expression of a mind and a spirit, of the mind which receives the experience and the spirit which shapes it, and it is quite impossible that a truly sensitive mind will write badly or clumsily or tell lies about what it knows. The quarrel which breaks out at intervals between the supporters of art for art's sake, and those persons who insist that art should have an edifying effect, is a sham quarrel, with wooden swords. In the sense that the artist can only express what is in him he has no other cause why he should write—or paint, or model a figure. But unless he hides or destroys them he does none of these things to himself, however indifferent he may be to the judgement passed on them. It is therefore certain that they will have an effect on other minds and what effect this is forms an integral part of our judgement on them. There is no such thing as a book or a picture existing apart from human terms of reference, since man made it and a man receives it.

In this sense all art is an assessment of life, a

judgement passed on it by the artist. You may know his attitude to it by what he chooses to present to you as significant. Beauty in any work of the artist is that aspect of life which he considers worth recording, as fully, as impressively, as he can. The textbooks tell you that the artist is the order-maker—in his work you may catch sight of a design, which we others miss because we are so sunk in life that we are aware only of events as they rush past us in time. This would be a safer definition if it were not vaguely connected in our minds with theological statements about the universe and perhaps with the dangerous Victorian notion that if you think in one and the same muddled moment about Lancashire cotton owners, slums, underfed children, Bond Street, and the beauty of nature, you will perceive that there is a meaning in life and that it is a reasonable one.

The truth is that the order which the artist imposes on the flux of life is drawn solely from himself. He has arranged things in a certain order in his mind, putting some things first because he sees them as most important, and it is this order which appears in his work. Its style is the reflection of his personal style, of the value at which he assesses different modes of living. It is even possible that he can only show you what looks like the most frightful disorder—if, for instance, he has become acutely conscious that the times

into which he has been born and the social system to which he belongs is breaking up from within. And perhaps, like Christian, he is so impressed by this and so anxious to warn others that he can only bring you news of disintegration and decay. In any case, the form of what he makes is determined, once for all, by the value he attaches to this or that or the other aspect of things. You hear critics talk about the bones of a book. What they tell you less often is that its bones are the author's bones, as its words are the visible extension of his nervous system.

Of all forms of art the novel is the meekest and, in our civilisation, the most potent for good or ill. It is like a flower which creeps close to the ground, yet spreads everywhere. It comes home with all of us. It slips into houses where nothing else is read or listened to, except the wireless and the daily newspaper. It has more effect than these, because it attaches itself to an even older impulse than the one which is fed by news. In the days when news was sparse and slow-moving, human interest centred in the character and doings of your neighbour. At this day a proper countrywoman is more deeply interested in the strange behaviour of the woman next door than she would be by news of a revolution in France. The novelist tells you about the woman next door. He first persuades you that you know Becky Sharp and Sam

Weller and then offers to satisfy your curiosity about them. He goes deeper and tells you what, without knowing it, you have been feeling and thinking about your own life. You are reading, and suddenly, with a shock of delight, you understand something about yourself and about living which before you did not. It is as though some pieces of a puzzle sprang together in your mind, to complete a pattern. This is the deepest satisfaction of literature.

You can see now how dangerous the novelist is, because the medium in which he works is not words but it is your mind. He plays on it to make you laugh and cry; the strings of his fiddle are your nerves, and not as you suppose, the words and phrases of his story. These are only his bow. He can only play the tunes he knows, and if he only knows bad, cheap tunes he will play those, and the more cleverly and slickly he does it the greater the effect on your mind—which you have rashly handed over to him. There are novelists who make a great deal of money by playing over and over *All that I Want is Somebody to Love Me*. And perhaps there is not a great deal of harm in that. But suppose another person were trying to tell you that your house is on fire and you did not hear him because the foolish sentimental little tune drowned his voice. Something like that may actually be happening.

This is really a very strange moment in the history of the human race. You cannot go out to dinner or sit in a room with two or three people without one of them saying: 'What is going to happen?' To which the usual answer is: 'Heaven knows.' Notice the sudden freshening of interest in the music-hall songs and sentimental ballads of fifty years ago. It is as though people were trying to give themselves a feeling of safety by putting the clock back. From the viewpoint of the cosmic spectator—the phrase is Professor Eddington's—there might be something funny and tragic in it. Fear stalks in the darkness outside, and while we are waiting for it to try the handle of the door we turn on the wireless and take up a copy of So-and-so's new novel, which, whatever else it does, will not make us think.

The novelist has you all by the ears, and if instead of warning you that the forces at work to destroy your world have reached their point of utmost danger, he sings sentimental ditties or plays you *Over the Hills and Faraway*, he is actually betraying you to your deaths. It will be very easy to make fun of this and to pretend that I want my fellow novelists to go about asking themselves: 'What will be the moral and social effect of my new book?' and then to produce gloomy propaganda. That is nonsense. What I write I speak from my heart and mind into yours, and what

social effect my words have on you is not, not immediately, my business. Even if, like Bernard Shaw, I want to convert you to my moral and social beliefs I must think first how I can make you laugh or cry. Only—and this is the central knot of the argument—whether I want to convert you or only to keep you amused while I pick your pocket of seven and sixpence, my novel cannot fail of a wider effect. It will either make you more conscious of the world in which you live, or it will blind you with dreams and deafen you with an idle song. It will send you to look out of your window at the laughing, groaning, changing world or persuade you that a love affair or a month in Venice is all you need in order to be living the good life. Make no mistake about it—the novelist will do one or the other of these things to you whenever you invite him to fiddle on your nerves. A cheap dye will colour off on the skin, and cheap easy emotions will colour off on ours until we lose the habit of feeling and thinking for ourselves. And when we want to wear grief or joy we take down some shabby ill-made garment belonging to Miss So-and-so, the popular novelist, and muffle our foolish heads in it.

The novelist is able to play all these tricks on us because he is more aware than other people of what is going on in his own mind. He is able to examine and compare his own experiences and then

to convey them to you. The more sensitive he is, the more courage he shows in discarding that collection of newspaper cuttings and old rubbish which most of us keep in our minds because we are too lazy to clear them out, the more he can give us, and when we have read one of his books we are richer than when we began. We are the richer by contact with a mind more sensitive, more alive, and more honest than our own. A novelist who is merely clever or merely witty or merely, as we say of children, very noticing, may write novels which amuse or excite or soothe us, but at best he is only helping us to pass our time. At worst he is unfitting us for life by giving us weak or distorted or foolish notions about it. There is only one measure of goodness in a novel and that is its making you more sensitive in your relations with your fellows and more aware of what is going on within and without you. In short, the worth of a novel is its human worth, and not any fancied æsthetic quality, as if charm or beauty or understanding were something the novelist can summon to him provided he knows the spell.

The novelist is showing you his mind by means of words. He has to take his chance that certain words which stand for ideas and sensations and not for things—such words as ‘honour,’ ‘decency,’ ‘passion’—mean to us what they mean to him. He has to make himself as clear as possible—and if he

has done that honestly it is not his fault if we do not understand him. It may be the fault of our lack of training or narrow experience.

The impulse which is compelling him to tell you something should at the same time dictate the manner. If he is telling you how a man retreated all night with his battalion the writing should be plain, concrete, and economical. If he is describing a state of mind his first anxiety is to convey sensations and complexities of meaning—these mental events are more complex than physical ones, though not intrinsically more important, and may need more words to get them clear. What form, in the larger sense, his novel has, is the form it took in his mind when he began to think of it. And that will depend entirely upon the balance of his interests. Unconsciously at first, and then deliberately, he will reveal the direction of his interests by the way he arranges his story. This is true even when the story, as we understand the word, has been reduced to a thread, as in *Mrs. Dalloway* or *Tristram Shandy*. Nothing is out of place in a novel if it springs naturally from the writer's interest in his theme, but an exquisite piece of description may be out of place if he only added it to impress you. The only way in which you can discuss the *rightness* of a novel, or the rightness of some part of it in relation to the whole, is to try to decide whether it sprang from a genuine impulse, or whether the

writer snatched at what he could reach with least trouble and wrote a novel about that—as I suspect happened with one very popular novelist when he wrote *Faraway*. But again you realise that the worth of a novel depends on the quality of the original impulse, that is, on the quality of the writer's mind.

To make a definition wide enough to cover everything, and too vague to be much use, you can say that the novel deals with men and women in action—counting thoughts and feelings as latent action—and may use any means. In the novelist's view a thought is an event, and he cannot choose whether his novels shall contain more events of this interior kind or more of the outer life of his people. Always it is decided for him—by his own nature. You can make a more or less arbitrary division and talk about objective and subjective novels, but there is no final division. It is always and entirely a question of the stress—which falls just as you would expect, on that side of life where the novelist finds himself at home. The kind of novel we label subjective is actually a novel with a special set of objects, or with only one, the writer himself. It is concerned with thoughts and emotions not, or not in any very great measure, as they express themselves in action, but as they are in themselves, as the events which determine a man's life.

And you can see the danger that besets a novelist who looks too persistently within, at his interior

mode of action. He is like a man who tries to tell the time by examining only the works of his watch. He can give you a faithful account of them and he can report that they are moving, but he cannot unless he looks at the clock-face tell you what hour of the day it is, nor without looking at the world in which the clock exists tell you whether it is six o'clock at night or early morning. To be judged complete a novel must give an account of the whole man and of the activities which relate him to his fellows. It is not in the least certain that a novel which tells you what a butcher thinks and feels as he cuts up his joints is more valuable than one which describes him standing in his shop chopping and cutting and serving. It depends on how truly it is done and how profoundly the writer understands this inner life. He can give you just as dull, stupid, partial, and commonplace an account of emotions as of joints of beef. In any event, if he has left out the chopping and serving, he has told only half. A real novelist will include the whole, the butcher, his thoughts—which perhaps are not on his task at all: perhaps his wife is ill upstairs and as he chops he sees the brass rail of a bed and a white cloth—and the writer must have seen it all, together with the shawl worn by a thin woman, and the anxious face of a little boy, and the street with the cabs passing, which looks quite differently to the butcher who is afraid the noise will wake his

wife, and to the boy who wants to run quickly to the corner where his friends are waiting for him.

And in the same way an objective account of all this, however full, accurate, and exciting, will be nothing better than a blurred photograph if it is not related to the inner life of the men and women in the book and, in the writer's mind, to his view of human life itself. You can say that the objective novel reflects the social scene—and then what you mean is that it reflects the writer's understanding of it, and it will be true and profound or false and superficial precisely as he is in himself.

Look closer at the writer's business. You have been told that every man has one novel in him—the story of his life. This is only as true as if you were to say that every larder has in it what will make a pudding. Yourselves, getting up in the morning, preparing breakfast, eating, hurrying along the street to work, laughing, feeling pain, anger, happiness, fear, ecstasy, are the raw material of a novel. When I think about you with the idea of writing it something happens in my mind. A process starts there which must complete itself. Words I overhear in a bus are suddenly explained by the memory of something which happened to me a long time ago and the two together form a new object in my mind, which has to be fitted in with innumerable other objects. The state of rest in which my mind was before I began to write is

upset. One nerve starts another until my whole mind is roused, like a house in which some important event is taking place, with people scurrying along the passage answering bells, opening and closing doors, looking in cupboards for something that has been lost, turning out boxes of papers and all with an air of intense excitement and activity. But the excitement is only incidental and the wild running to and fro and opening and shutting of cupboard doors has an end in view. When it is achieved the disturbance will be over.

The end, which—unless I am a very confused or incompetent writer—has been before my mind the whole time, is to give you every necessary detail to enable you to understand what stirred me to write a novel about you, or about myself. Perhaps I saw you as one figure in a vast drama, a new *War and Peace*. I use you as the focussing point for my story, which covers as wide a map of the social scene as I can manage—you are an assistant in a large store or like the man in a novel by Barbusse you look through a hole in the wall at birth, life, and death in the next room. Or suppose instead that the images drawn together by the excitement, like steel filings round a magnet, are all somehow connected with myself. Then each object I discover in my mind, a memory or an emotion, is thickly encrusted with others. I cannot pull at one to bring it into light without

dragging out a dozen more—it is like a stone or a piece of wood which has lain a long time under the sea and become covered with weeds and the shells of living creatures. I begin to tell you how yesterday at tea I was given a chipped saucer. At once I remember that when my son was ill I used a saucer with a chipped edge to float his night-light and I see the room, the tiny circle of light on the ceiling, and the curtain I made myself, and I remember sewing at it and the drop of blood on my pricked finger; mixed up with all this is the anxiety I felt then, and as I recall it, a new sharper terror flows in over the old and I begin to think about war and how if war came I could not save him, and this thought fills me with a mad anger and fear. I want to convey all this to you and at the same time not let you lose sight of the unity in the book—which comes from myself, that identity in contraries which is the meaning of a life.

It is certain that if you were to begin your study of a novel by taking it to pieces you might only discover what it died of. With that warning let us look more closely at three or four novelists, in the hope of learning what may be useful to us in meeting them on equal terms.

Take first one bearing the label ‘objective’—an American, Ernest Hemingway. At first sight this writer would appear to be the simplest and most direct of modern novelists. He takes a group of

persons, and tells you as shortly and plainly as possible what they did and said. Everything for him is concrete. Nothing exists except what he can see and touch. He does not analyse or ponder the roots of an act or an idea. He does not understand an emotion—the emotion of love, for instance. He reduces all such complex feelings to the moment of physical sensation. The first scene in the hospital between Catherine and her lover in *Farewell to Arms* describes a physical passion which, for the writer, is a complete account of the relationship that exists between a man and a woman in love.

It is a fact that as soon as we begin to analyse a passion it disappears. Therefore if you want to persuade your readers that two persons feel a passion for one another you may use the most direct and concrete expressions to call up a concrete image in his mind. The key-words in any language are simple and primitive. These have quickest access to our imagination. They affect our nerves as do those sounds we associate with the simplest, least differentiated feelings. We need to understand something of music or of life to enjoy the Brandenburg Concertos, but the dullest of us can thrill to fife and trumpets, and though the players may be tired shabby men, ex-soldiers, in our imagination they and we are heroes.

It is this simplicity, this appeal to our crudest interests, which explains Hemingway's success. He

appeals especially to the over-sophisticated, by offering them the illusion of living by violent and sensuous impulses. In England at least his success has been largely with the intellectuals. They have praised his simplicity, his directness, without perceiving that he is simple because he has so little to say. Like a child, or an idiot, he spells out the visible world. There is a straight road, he says. There are leaves covered with dust. I walk on the road. The sun shines. I am hot. Now I am drinking. The wine tastes good, it is cold. The men and women in his books live on their senses—and this is not the same thing as living in them. Life on this plane seems no more than a brutal impulse, which it is not worth accounting for and which leaves no traces.

Contrast this kind of simplicity with the simplicity of T. F. Powys. The words, even the gestures, are the same. There is the same directness of approach to the natural world. But where the American feels life as a nearly mechanical interplay of sensations, the English novelist is aware the whole time of spiritual powers acting through the physical. His words and images, describing instinctive acts, are the visible reflection of these powers. Their effect on our nerves is quite different. If we bring from our reading of Hemingway any vision of the world, it is a world which is dying from within—underneath its violence

and colour it is empty, desolate, and rotten. All actions are equally important because none has an importance beyond the minute, and they are good or bad only as they satisfy or defeat our present wants. In T. F. Powys's world everything is related to his vision of good and evil, which is almost that of a mediæval poet, and so, although he is writing about a social order which may soon cease to exist, he is able at moments to show us our passions themselves. This is valuable, this enriches our understanding. But Hemingway understands nothing except that he feels at particular moments happy or angry or excited.

Both these writers are 'objective' in intention—both, that is, are drawn to describe the outward life of men and women. The difference between them is one of belief—and it is absolute. Now turn to two writers who care a great deal more to explain how men think and feel than what they do. Imagine for a moment that Virginia Woolf is writing an account of your life, of one day in your life. You are a school teacher. You live in Battersea, in rooms you share with a friend, and you cross the park every morning to your work. You are interested in socialism and you read a great many books and pamphlets, or you are engaged and hoping to marry. To your friends you seem a lively efficient person whose days vary very little, and they ask you where you are going

to spend August and what you have been reading, and your answers to these questions satisfy them that they know well enough what you are like. To Virginia Woolf all these facts—which pretend to describe you—are unimportant. The spectacle of you teaching, reading, stepping into trains, interviewing house agents, scarcely detains her for a moment—she brushes it impatiently aside and begins an exploration of her own into your life. This takes her into a world of which your intimates know nothing. When you were putting your hat on before the mirror, pulling at it and adjusting your coat, you were remembering a stupid act and enduring agonies of regret. And this reminds you of something that happened when you were very young and at once, while you seem to be in the dark narrow passage of a house in Battersea, you are crossing a garden in full sunlight with the person who then filled your thoughts; you listen to him and you see the yellow flowers of the laburnum and the mark on your shoe and think that you are going to cry—but all you do is to open the door of a house in Battersea and step briskly along the pavement. Your whole day, while you are at work, and afterwards, when you are seated at home reading, or mending, is a succession of these inner events. You are assailed by every kind of emotion, from anger and mortification to pure ecstasy. Time—which hands your

outer life to you in small grudging remnants, measured off on a clock—is here as free with you as the air. You can turn in it where you like, and while your actions since you awoke this morning have occupied precisely fifteen hours you have in your mind lived out half a lifetime of experience. The whole of time, yesterday, to-day, and tomorrow, falls round you here and now; you can dip your hands in the stream which ran past you in last year's sunlight. And this, Mrs. Woolf says, is your real life. This incalculable unregulated creature is you, and the really significant moments are not those in which you appear as a successful teacher or a kind competent friend, but those moments, not spoken about to anyone, when you laughed, cried, danced, suffered, or were happy, with your whole self.

You can see how differently Virginia Woolf and Arnold Bennett would regard the same young woman, as the subject for a novel. But now compare with Mrs. Woolf a writer whose preoccupation with the inner life of his characters is fully as sharp as hers—D. H. Lawrence. They are alike in no other respect. You can say of Mrs. Woolf's novels that the action is little more than a fine skin, through which you trace a network of nerves charged with thoughts and feelings. In Lawrence's the action is intensely significant. It is emotion issuing in action —issuing, where there is a conflict between two

characters, with considerable violence. Lawrence is using the most precise and concrete terms to convey deep emotional experiences. There are times when he cannot avoid becoming obscure—due to what is, I think, the impossibility of translating certain levels of feeling directly into prose of this order. Just as there are sounds too fine for human hearing, so there are modes of feeling for which no words exist. To attempt to convey them in words defeats even Lawrence, who feels more and more intensely than any modern novelist.

Man desires, strives, and achieves. There are moments in history when what the artist desires seems possible of achievement because it is not denied or menaced by what is outside him. He feels at home in the world. And it is not necessary that he should approve of it so long as he is confident that what he says will be instantly and completely understood by his own world. Such moments do not last. The forms which express one generation's understanding of life are feeble and annoying to the next. Thought has reached and stepped across another boundary, and the artist rushes after it, kicking up his heels in the air of a new country; to his dazzled eyes the very stones and grass of this country are fresh and wonderful and he can describe them a hundred times without wearying of it.

What you must realise is that the novelist is

always, and in any mood, the discoverer of his times—whether he is detached and assured, like a man at his ease among friends, or in the temper of a pioneer, a reformer, or a traveller for business or pleasure. You cannot legislate for him, and say that one style of writing is bad in itself and another good. To say that Hemingway and D. H. Lawrence both employ direct concrete narrative and a colloquial turn of speech tells you nothing of the lightest value about either of them. It does not make the only judgement it is permissible to pass on a novelist—since it does not tell you that Hemingway's capacity for feeling is clumsy and insensitive where Lawrence's is exquisitely sensitive. The craft of the novelist—when by craft you mean mere technical skill—is not worth discussing. The quality of a novel, and its human value, escape all but the most meagre definition in technical terms. When I read Hemingway, part of my mind is filled with admiration for the skill with which he does what he set himself to do. A deeper instinct assures me it was not worth doing. Hemingway's attitude to experience is shallow, over-sophisticated, and uselessly violent. The other day I read of some new composer as a 'hot-jazz genius.' Hemingway is the 'hot-jazz genius' of the modern novel, and the respect you pay him will vary accordingly as you believe or do not believe that modern life can worthily be expressed in terms of 'hot-jazz.'

In truth, a novelist is to-day very unfortunate in his birth. His proper study is life in all the forms it assumes *in his time*, and to-day the forms of life are deeply degraded. Of no other age was it possible to say, as you can say of this, that human values are less considered than the values created by the machines. We are not the masters of the machines which our ingenuity has created. We are their hapless slaves, and we do not use them for our lasting enrichment, but are used by them. You have but to look over the disorder we please ourselves in calling a civilisation to see how the needs and desires of human beings are served.

More than other men the artist is aware of this cheapening of human values. The more honest and sensitive he is the more sharply it will affect him. If he cannot face it he will run away and write beautifully about the past or about an unreal present. Otherwise he will be driven to wrestle with it, and not merely in order to expose it, but in the hope of changing it.

And this is the true function of the novelist, and the justification for his existence and for the rather exaggerated attentions we pay him as an artist. He does not exist only in order to write beautifully or amusingly. He may do both and be thanked for it. But his proper passion—and all the rest are not worth a straw—is to show us to ourselves as we are. It is only by knowing what he is and of

what he is capable that man can respect himself. I believe with all my will that a novelist is more important than a politician. The politician merely exploits or is afraid of our passions. The novelist can make us understand them. And when we understand ourselves, and our secret motives and desires, we can do anything, we can even get the better of the machines.

The ways in which a novel can be constructed are too many to be important. They are not the craft of the novelist, but they are determined by his craft—which is something subtler and more significant than his use of words. His craft is truly his capacity for living. The greater writer he is the more strongly he is forced to abandon himself to experience—since it is the only way in which he can know himself and what is outside himself. At the same time he must try to give a precise, honest, and fearless account of it.

But these are not two activities, but only one. The mind which experiences is the mind which communicates the experience. Whoever writes a great novel has first felt deeply, and the way in which he writes it, his style, down to the merest details of construction, is from first to last determined by the fineness or crudeness, the honesty or dishonesty, which he brings to his business of interpreter between men and life.

What a remarkable man A. R. Orage was. Writer. whom no one could suspect of recklessness in money matters wrote for The New Age for nothing, simply because he asked them to write for it. I think that when, in 1932, he started The New English Weekly he did not find so easy a generosity abroad. I recall that he said to me in that café in Chancery Lane—I wish now I had gone there oftener—‘Young writers are a great deal more commercial-minded than they were before the War.’ He only noted the fact, with an ironic side-glance.

It was because I and my friends in 1913-14 would have given anything to be asked to write for The New Age that I compelled myself for more than a year to read as many as half a dozen novels every month, and review them for The New English Weekly. In the ordinary way I do not read so many a year. I did it for an idea, for a memory—if you like, for a number of young dead, myself among them.

And for A. R. Orage. I read of his death in an evening paper when I was coming home in the bus. My mind stood still. This death shocked me. It was the end of more than of one man; it ended the story of an age, and the story of my youth as well, though I did not think of that then. I remember that I had a curiously distinct image of him, smiling. I felt silenced and stopped. None of these words are real enough. The shock and the silencing were real.

Novels and Novelists

It is rash to say that the novel is moving past mere tale-telling. The instant success of a *Good Companions* is proof, if the proof were worth anything, that most men prefer to be told a fairy-tale. But this is March hare logic. You might as well say that because most men prefer jazz to music Gershwin is a sounder musician than Bach. I am a working novelist and so (it is better to admit it at once) ready to be over-interested in the method and style of a novel, but this is a fault natural in critics. (And indeed necessary, unless the critic is to become merely an apt improviser on other men's themes.) I do not seriously suppose that what I take to be a new departure is no more than a new style. I am persuaded that the real difference between Mr. Priestley and the author of *Pigeon Irish* is not that Mr. Francis Stuart writes with economy and precision and Mr. Priestley wisely lets his style take care of itself—which it is well able to do, being a robust, usual, no-nonsense sort of writing. The difference is one that cuts clean across present-day fiction, dividing the old from the new, the satisfied from the doubters, those

whose minds are set from those who must go on growing. The difference is precisely one of values; and when you have decided that a novel belongs with the new you have not said at all whether it is good or bad, well or badly done. You have said that its author is trying for or being used by a new impulse.

For all I know this impulse may signal the death of fiction. As it shows itself in the modern novel it is unmistakeably a revulsion against the fairy-tale (despite the fact that the popular appetite for fairy-tales is as greedy as ever). The growing end of the novel to-day is in the minds of those novelists whose intention can be put something like this: 'I'm not interested in making things up, I want to get at what is real.' Whatever else it is—it may, indeed, be a romantic temptation, a false start—this is not the story-telling impulse, though a story may serve its purpose.

Some months ago I had a letter asking me to tell the writer what she must do to become a good novelist. Rather than seem careless I answered at some length, but uselessly, since the only useful

questions I could have raised were not in my right to ask. How sensitive are you? Do you wish to be truthful or easy? I suppose (but twelve years is the long time it has taken me to learn what a born writer would scarcely have needed to learn) that no first-rate novel was ever written but by a mind intensely alive to its experiences, able and patient to think round them, and anxious to communicate them whole. Lawrence had such a mind. So has the author of *Passage to India*. Very few modern novels reach the level of awareness Lawrence reached over and over again. And it is not in the spirit of the time to take novel writing very seriously. We are good fellows, sensible and all that. ‘Literature is something you go in for when you haven’t the guts to write a real novel’—aphorism dropped in casual talk by a popular novelist. Rubbish—and damaging rubbish when it drops into the ears of young writers.

A book of the first importance for readers, writers, and critics of the novel has lately been published—and received by some critics with polite irritation, by others with silly abuse or derision,

and by only a few with the attention it merits. I do not propose to discuss *Fiction and the Reading Public* by Q. D. Leavis further than to say that it should be in the hands of every serious writer, every self-respecting critic, and every teacher of English. But there are certain comments to make, based in part on the book and in part on its reception.

The book is directed by its author's assumption that bad fiction has a direct influence on society through the minds of its readers. The values supported or implied in the work of a popular writer are adopted (in a great measure unconsciously) by his readers. They will think well of social forms to which he has given his approval (by presenting them as valuable or attractive); their emotions in an actual situation are coloured, dictated, by emotions he has made to seem the appropriate ones. It must therefore be extremely important to have some index of the quality of the thought and the emotional attitudes with which a popular writer infects his readers. Mrs. Leavis brings a number of witnesses, living and dead, in support of her belief that the novelists most read to-day have neither the will nor the capacity to criticise false and decaying values and to create or induce states of mind in which more adequate values become acceptable. On the contrary, they accept the popular values (that is, the lowest common

measure of intelligence and sensibility among library subscribers) and labour to write only what will conform with them in the pleasantest way. This surely very obvious fact must, you would think, be assented to by any responsible critic. Examine any best-seller. Against what herd prejudice does it offend? What emotion disturbing to our complacence does it rouse? But responsible critics have been found to whom Mrs. Leavis appears as a mocker and defiler. ('Wuss,' said my uncle. 'Blasphemy.') This is really extraordinary. What are *les clercs* about?

But isn't it true that what the newspapers call 'our leading novelists' lead from behind? It is a commonplace to say that we are living in a mechanical civilisation, threatened now with destruction by the machines which made it. The forces of destruction are not in the machines, but they are in the minds which rely on and are caught by them, and if salvation is to come it will come only through a change of mind. Very likely it will not come—or not in time. But no consciousness that forces are at work to ruin us ruffles the complacence of our best-sellers. Pocketing their fees, they leave their readers where they found them, in the dark, confused by the noise of saxophones, wireless programmes, politicians cadging for votes, sellers of luxuries, Sir James Jeans, the Bishop of London, Dr. Stopes. They don't tell

us where they stand (except at the receipt of custom). They don't sort the noises out for us, they reproduce the sum of them for pay. They don't stimulate us to a finer control of our lives: at worst they encourage us to believe that God's in His machine; at best they offer us an hour's escape.

Distinguish here between a social tract and social criticism. If a novel is not the second it is nothing much. Critics readily assume that if a novel is well-written it must be a good novel. But if its effect is to persuade its readers to accept a cheap nasty view of life (as for instance that to live well all that they need is a car and a handbook of Freudian first principles) then the better it is written the worse it is. This is not because fiction should be moral (to use a time-saving formula), but because by no means can fiction avoid a moral effect. A well-written book is not existing beautifully in a vacuum. It is the medium through which the experiences of the writer and his attitude to them affect the reader's attitude to his own life. Because of this, a society in which the tide of cheap easy fiction washes continually through the minds of millions of readers is a society in danger of its life. Hackneyed emotions take the place of real ones, moribund ideas pass for living—the wish and the capacity to look directly at life are quickly and surely destroyed.

Mrs. Leavis supposes that a critical minority, aware of the dangers, can do something to counteract them. It is barely possible. The immediate effect of her book has been to divide sharply those who are satisfied with present standards in art (and thus, naturally, in living) from those who are deeply dissatisfied and alarmed. It is at best a melancholy amusement to annotate a new *Trahison des Clercs* with the names of critics who ought to have known better.

It is a commonplace that most novels are written for women. But although one best-seller has said lately (in a daily newspaper) that he makes his appeal deliberately to women readers, I feel certain that more reputable best-sellers do not, when they sit down to write, say to themselves: 'I must get the women.' It just comes so. Deep calls to deep, and the writer's thought is sucked into the immense vacuum created in women's minds by a civilisation in which they have either nothing to do or too much (too much machine-minding). However it happens, it is extremely rare to come across a novel which appears to have been written

from a masculine angle and to make its appeal most naturally to masculine assumptions. There is a difference, certainly, between the ways in which the masculine and the feminine mind view certain important events—the sexual relation is only one of these events—but whether the differences are due to training or rooted in the nervous system I do not profess to know. And I had better get out of this before I get into worse trouble.

It is surprising, and in a way refreshing, to begin a modern novel and to realise after a few pages that the writer is talking to men, no doubt not deliberately but because he cannot make the adjustments which would (you may say) emasculate his appeal. Here it should not be necessary to say that a great novel is equally intelligible to any mind which is able to move on the level reached by its author—talk of maleness and femaleness does not arise at this level. *The White Flame*, by Max René Hesse, is not a particularly good novel, but it is a particularly interesting one, since if partial assumptions must be made and a one-sided attitude taken up it is good that for once attitude and assumptions should be uncompromisingly masculine. The action of the book takes place on two planes. On one it is an account, a revelation, perhaps, of the thoughts and ambitions which are taking shape in the minds of a great

many Germans. Pushing against the unnatural restraint put upon their country they turn east, towards Poland. The scene is a German garrison town. The two chief actors are the adjutant Partenau and the young ensign Stefan Kiebold. They play an elaborate war game: Russia and Germany against Poland, Czecho-Slovakia and Roumania; France supporting the Poles, Italy against France. Perhaps the strategy is all nonsense —its significance is the wish that directs it. In its other aspect the book is a study of the passionate friendship which springs up between the two men; the attraction is physical and mental. Partenau's suicide ends a relationship made impossible by the social pressure against it. The stages in their relationship are shown without emphasis, there is no feeling that what is taking place need be viewed with excitement. When Stefan lies awake it is ideas and strategy which have excited his mind. The writing has an invigorating firmness and curt-
ness. This book bulks larger in the mind afterwards than it does during reading—because the writer has reserves, has had the good taste and strength of mind to assume the intelligence and sensibility of his readers. This is a relatively great merit in a period when most novelists feel impelled to empty the contents of their minds out on their pages. It is certainly something to be able to carry a novel about in your mind, to think over and re-

shape it, instead of allowing the wretched stuff to run out again as quickly as possible.

Someone has written to protest that I make far too much fuss about the way a book is written. 'So long as the matter is all right, the form—in a novel—doesn't matter.' What value there is in this comment (there is not much) is in its recognition of the fact that a novel can survive a certain unevenness, or clumsiness, in the writing. Can you recall any long novel of the first rank which is not occasionally dull or (relatively) meaningless? It would hardly be possible for the novelist to maintain over long stretches the concentration, the word-to-word closeness of experience, which is required of poetry. He works in sentences and paragraphs where the poet works in words. One can admit that *War and Peace* contains pages of dull, irrelevant matter and still uphold it as a great novel. H. G. Wells can say (of young men writing from the front): 'They wrote to her at first upon notepaper adorned with regimental crests, but their later letters as they worked their slow passages towards the place of death were pencilled on thin

paper'—and then say the same thing over again dozens of times and no harm done. Such diffuseness would be the death of a poem. But this is not to say that form in a novel 'doesn't matter'. The colloquial 'It isn't what he says, it's the tone of his voice' has the root of the matter. The form of any novel is not so much the way in which the novelist has chosen to write it, as the way which has been chosen for him—by his attitude to experience. It is our first means of knowing how sensitive, how conscious, how uncompromising towards himself, and aware of his time a writer is. We have fallen into the habit of discussing form apart from content, and even ask ourselves which is the more important—the last is a little like those grim advertisements which discuss whether beauty is a question of the skin or the stomach. It may sometimes be convenient to speak of form as though it were something apart from the writer's attitude, so long as we know what we are doing and do not, by the mere act of treating it separately, come to think of it as a separable quality.

Writers themselves are as responsible as anyone for this critical bad habit. In the writer's mind the experience and the words are one. His constant effort is to find words which will convey as much of his experience as possible, and as closely as possible. Hence his habit of talking as though the words were the important thing. To him, in so

much as they are his only means of communication, they are—but this does not excuse the critic for confounding the means with the end. I am moved to these remarks by a reading of the first volume of *Arnold Bennett's Journal*. His intense pre-occupation with style is the measure of his importance as a writer. And the fact that his writing remained clear and shapely for long after he had lost touch with an experience worth the communicating, measures its partial unimportance for the critic of the novel. To be accurate, it is a reminder that style is more complex than the correct use of words. The journal covers the period in which his finest book was written. There are no long passages in *The Old Wives' Tale* which have the intensity of the account of Daniel Clayhanger's childhood in the first book of the trilogy, but there are many shorter ones, and the novel as a whole is one of the great novels of the century. Yet it is possible to detect in the *Journal*—we are so wise after the event—that flaw in the writer's mind to which we owe those books for which the critics apologised. The writer did not—he had too much spirit. He cared intensely for the material rewards of success. Somehow this was entangled in him with his care to pack the concrete facts of experience with the most complex meaning of which he was capable. He was acute, not sparing of himself; he had a great capacity for

experience and for the comparing of experiences: and with all this—the equipment of a major novelist—he had some insensitive place in his mind, some stain of crudeness, that spread, and slowly corrupted his fineness and the quality of his response to experience. You can judge how the nature of his responses changed and coarsened by the simple but cruel test of reading *Imperial Palace* immediately after *The Old Wives' Tale*. One effect will be to increase your respect for and sharpen your delight in the earlier book.

In *Nineteen nineteen* we have a novel in which the form fits as closely as possible the writer's attitude. John dos Passos is one of the few living novelists whose consciousness of the contemporary world reaches below the surface. He is the novelist of its disintegration, its stale disillusion, its subconscious fear—which is partly a desire—of breakdown. The method he uses reflects a disintegration which is taking place at different levels: the narratives of a number of lives are run off in separate sections; between the sections a newsreel flings up its lying, sensational, or merely meaningless fragments, and an Eye registers the impressions pouring in on the writer's mind. Short sardonic biographies of public men open up yet another level. The violent transitions do what a continuous narrative could not—they uncover the cracks which, opening everywhere under the surface, threaten the

social fabric with ruin. It is like being invited to watch the preparation of an earthquake. The method has definite limitations: deliberate disunity no more produces the finest in art than it does in a society. The book's only unity is the consciousness of the writer, which itself is ravaged by indignation. Hence the effect is that of an angry man telling unpleasant truths. The book should be read, certainly. Not to read it is cowardly. It is not pleasant, and contains the story of the lynching of an I.W.W. man which I read first some years ago and hoped never to read again. This is the second novel of what I take to be a series, and it is possible that later volumes will suggest that there is a term set to decay and a road going on.

Above all, a writer needs—to achieve complete unspoiled development—the support of a hierarchy of values. In an age when values are disintegrating, or when any number of separate specialised values (the values of bankers, soldiers, politicians, etc.) are competing madly for place, the novelist is forced out of his proper growth. Either he will waste his energies in contriving his own system of

values (D. H. Lawrence)—with the consequent danger of cutting himself off from the majority who neither share nor like his values—or he will maintain himself in a difficult scepticism (Huxley), or accept disorder and disintegration, and swearing that all is for the best, write books to amuse and distract the populace (their name is Legion). The rebelling novelist will write his angry, sceptical, or difficult books for a decreasing public, and the novelist who believes only in himself and his popularity will produce books which become emptier and emptier by the deflating action of time. (Is this all? Why not a novelist great enough to see the whole of his age and controlled enough to present and interpret it as a whole? There is no answer—except that an English novelist of this size is not writing or has not yet been born.)

The appearance of the fifth volume of *The Tale of Genji* defines—from outside—the present situation. This long and marvellously poised and controlled book could not have been written unless its author had been able to assume a complete and widely accepted social morality. Inside this, as in a frame, she creates and places her characters. The value of this frame, this shaping and modelling of the content, is to be compared with the value of a particular form in poetry—it is only on this plane that form in a novel can properly be compared with form in a poem. The proper comparison is

not between two ways of using words but between the attitude dictated to the novelist by his philosophy of life and the choice and arrangement of words dictated to the poet by his attitude to an experience. For the novelist's purpose it matters very little, if at all, whether the system of values he assumes is based on democracy or its obverse, on Plato or Aquinas, or on what you will. It needs only to be complete and believed in. The society which produced Lady Murasaki was a closed order; it was narrow, artificial and exquisitely cultivated. Hand-writing was a deeply significant art. Letter-writing and conversation presupposed close knowledge of the poets and the wit to write a graceful verse where a 'Don't trouble' or 'Thank you for your flowers' would, to less courtly notions, be adequate. Kaoru gives away to a watchman a magnificent hunting-cloak 'made of priceless white damask.' A busy courtier snatches a moment to visit his mother's garden for the sake of an especially lovely tree. An old poverty-stricken Prince is visited by the gay young people of the Court because of his skill as a musician: they form themselves into an orchestra and play for him. A young girl's fitness for marriage or honourable concubinage is judged by her accomplishments as poet and musician. So restricted is this society that a young Prince feels a night away from home as an event and is enraptured by the sight, strange to him, of willows

reflected in the waters of a river. For the class to whom civilisation at this point was possible, life was as exquisite in its pleasures as in the melancholy which moved some few to retreat from the world. Lady Murasaki knows nothing of any other life, but in this one she is so much at home that we, her readers, are as much at home. From the opening page we feel that we are in the hands of a novelist who knows exactly what she is about, who will never stammer, never become flustered or fail to come down in the pure middle of the note. There is a delicate and penetrating irony in her analysis of character and a deep understanding of the emotions that govern lives. To read *The Lady of the Boat* is to be in contact with a mind richly and deeply sensitive, an experience sufficiently rare to give thanks for. After the author the thanks lie at Mr. Waley's door, for a masterly translation.

M. Maurois's new novel offers curious proof of the assumptions made at the beginning of this article. In France the disintegration of values which threatens our age has begun indeed but has gone less deep. The habit of individual freedom is strong in Frenchmen, so is their grasp on a few clearly-defined realities. (This attitude of thought and spirit is France's splendid gift to the European heritage: in another aspect it is the knife in her hand.) It is not surprising to find M. Maurois, while aware that all is not well, more assured,

quieter in his mind, than English novelists of equal intelligence (not a large company). The central figure of *The Family Circle* was studying at the *lycée* in 1914—that is, she belongs to a generation in revolt against convention but aware of it. She rebels in talk and act. She has a lover, the young man to whom she is engaged. Because he will not risk a life of poverty and struggle in Paris she throws him over and marries the son of a rich banker. After marriage she takes other lovers. But it is only in the freedom of her girlhood that she differs from the intelligent Frenchwoman of any generation. The structure of family life, itself based on a hard sense of the real, remains almost unshaken. The economy and precision shown in the choice of significant incidents in Denise's life are not the least of M. Maurois's talents. This book interests, without giving very much.

In an epoch of disintegration there are stages, moments, in which the movement can be observed, and recorded. The value and accuracy of the record are determined by the degree of sensitivity in the writer, who thus reflects himself in reflecting his age. *Two Silver Roubles*, by Esther Salaman, is an account, based on actual events, of a Jewish girl's experiences in the Ukraine during the Russian revolution of 1917. Petlura, the Bolsheviks, the pogroms—as a Jew, she and hers are perpetually in danger. Her account of a pogrom

that spared her family is the more terrible for the self-control with which she gives it. The book has the monotony and formlessness of a chronicle, but there is nothing raw or superficial in the telling or in the character of the writer as it is revealed to us. Events, related with sharp and unselfconscious certainty, are less important than the imagination working to present them as a spiritual experience, deeply felt and faithfully told. For the reader the book is an experience of the greatest value, rare and heartening, breeding faith, not despair.

Regiment Reichstag, by Kurt Lamprecht, is another such setting down of experience, less moving because the emotion communicated by the writer is less deep, but little less important as the record of a crucial moment in the European rake's progress. How many people recall that in January, 1919, Germany was within a thought of chaos? This book is a narrative of the events, part accident and part—the most part—the working-out of qualities in the German character that averted it. It is a remarkable story, in itself and in its implications, here told with a spare and not unhumorous clarity. Othmar Werch walking down Potsdamer-Strasse with nothing but his chilled hands in his pockets of his officer's overcoat finds himself nearly without warning at the head of a leaderless company clamouring, but without arms and almost without encouragement, to be allowed to save the Reich.

At the end of the book, again penniless, he walks moodily down the same street. In the few weeks between he and his like have saved Germany—but for what? Their heroism is a habit rather than a spirit. It exists side by side with a cynical disbelief in governments and fine sentiments. It is the metal governments waste, as though it were not precious.

Is it possible that Mr. Plomer is that English novelist who will present and interpret our times for us? It is possible, but it is not likely. None the less, no one of the younger writers gives clearer intimations of wishing to understand his age or is better equipped to convey his knowledge. He writes with direct, firm, and unhurried assurance, his characters express admirably themselves and the contemporary temper. Again and again in *The Case is Altered* we become aware of the invisible filaments uniting human beings to each other and to their age. The scene is a London boarding-house, allowing Mr. Plomer to bring together persons of widely different lives—these really are brought together, and do not merely go in and out by the same door. The murder, in which all by their actions are involved, is splendidly imagined and told. And yet—the very neatness with which action and characters are dovetailed rouse doubts. This young novelist is too accomplished. He knows too certainly what he can do well. These doubts are roused in us by his qualities.

In *Two Living and One Dead* by Sigurd Christiansen, the excitement, which begins on one plane, with a murder, is transferred immediately to another. Of three clerks in a post-office, two resist a raider: one is killed and the other, whose resistance is more accidental than designed, is lightly wounded. The third clerk, who has a moment to reflect, hands over the money in his care, because he does not feel that it is worth dying for. From now the book turns on the effects of Berger's deliberate choice, in himself and in the attitude to him of the community, which includes his wife, the person who stands to him in a different relation from all others. Because Berger is an intelligent man the conflict has value. The author uncovers it with a subtlety matched by the shortness and directness of the narrative. There is the social aspect—for what ends may the community justly call on one of its members for his life? Berger's refusal is a deliberate one, of the will and spirit—to be compared with the attitude stated by D. H. Lawrence in a letter: 'I know that if the Germans wanted my little house, I would rather give it them than fight for it. . . . To fight for possessions, goods, is what my soul *will not* do.' With this aspect the personal one is involved. Berger's wife, loving him, relieved that he is alive, cannot refrain from tormenting him to ease her own doubts and the discomfort of social obloquy. Again this

reaches on one side towards the obscene women who give away white feathers in war time and on the other to the root of war in the individual heart. Berger himself has to make certain by a strategem that he is not merely a coward among braver men. This novel raises issues wider than those it states.

In an article in the *Spectator*, Mr. L. A. G. Strong explained that weekly reviewers are not critics, not concerned with final values, concerned only to recommend books for the reading lists of tolerably intelligent readers. He says, in effect: 'It is not our business to judge a novel by the highest standards. When we say that a novel is very well written, brilliant, witty, we are not in fact, or in our minds, comparing it with the acknowledged masterpieces of good writing, brilliance and wit. We are saying that to a reader of average education and discernment, it will appear to be very well-written, etc.' What this comes to is that Mr. Strong, the critic of the *Spectator*, is willing to apply to the novels sent to him for review deliberately debased standards—debased, that is, from the standards of Mr. Strong the novelist, who would

never be willing to write below his best. His excuse—that he is reviewing for the benefit of the general. His real reason—that he cannot bring himself to write with cold impartiality about any novel which has been written with care, thought, and some honesty. He knows too well the sustained effort made by the writer. To himself he says: ‘This is not Jane Austen though it is in the manner, and I can see that it has been written with real care, and it is not without wit’—and so thinking, he praises it in words he could scarcely better if it were actually another Jane Austen. He is not thinking of the novel as a novel, nor even about the general reader, though he pretends so to himself: he is thinking about the writer and about all he knows to have been in the writer’s mind, the faith and the effort.

If this were generally understood, it would create in the minds of readers of reviews a kind of scepticism which would eventually defeat Mr. Strong’s own purpose. From believing only half Mr. Strong says they would come to believe none of it. So that, out of kindness, out of a refusal to set himself up to be a judge over his fellows, he would have destroyed his reader’s faith not merely in his critical sense (which in their innocence they now accept, thinking of him as a critic and not only of him as a supplier of library lists), but in the worth of the books he praised. Something of

this sort is taking place. A little more, and it will be enough that Messrs. X, Y and Z have praised a novel very highly for intelligent persons to mistrust it unread. And this is not what Mr. Strong meant should happen, when he began to be a reviewer. He did not mean to illustrate the virtues of gentleness and humility by committing hari-kari over the body of criticism.

There is a great deal more to say than this. I will try to get it said in time but this is not the time. No person who is seriously interested in the state of criticism will have missed F. R. Leavis's essay in the second number of *Scrutiny*. Anything I can add will have chiefly a pathological interest—the confessions of a reviewer.

There is a sound, if disreputable, reason, why reviewers should measure the week's novels by a comfortably low standard. If they did not, the bulk of the fiction published in any season would fall below the point at which criticism is possible, and the reviewers would lose their trifling excuse for existing. The critic who has told himself that he will remember his classics and judge by their

light all novels that pass under his eye will sicken of his work. He will sicken of repeating: 'This third-rate (timid, mediocre) novel is sufficiently competent, nicely phrased, amusing, thoughtful, etc.' Either he will give up reviewing or will give up trying to classify novels by their orders and content himself with describing their features. The qualifying word 'third-rate' will disappear from his reviews and the words 'competent, thoughtful, etc.', will remain and acquire a false weight from appearing now as integers and no longer as fractions of the whole. This is the form of dishonesty known as the reasonable compromise, and I am in no way able to cast stones. Deliberately dishonest reviewers must be very rare—there is no need to suppose that the critic who compared T. F. Powys (to his disadvantage) with the writer of a pleasantly negligible novel is dishonest: he may only be silly or ignorant.

The Sleepwalkers. We, men living in 1932, are the sleepwalkers. In Germany, during the worst post-war period, in Russia during the stages of the revolution, and in other, eastern parts of Europe,

the dreamer has half awakened into a nightmare. In this country our sleep is becoming more and more uneasy. The conversation of ordinary men is full of such phrases as: 'What is going to happen?', and the answer: 'Heaven knows.' The unfounded optimism which at this time last year filled the minds of voters for a National Government has been succeeded by doubts, fear, and growing disappointment. People do not understand what is happening. They feel a vague alarm, not for long soothed by the mirage-making of the popular press, which detects gleams of hope with idiot regularity as the dream approaches ever nearer the moment in which the sleeper will wake screaming to the unbearable reality.

Until now the efforts made by a few persons in this country to rouse attention to the danger before it is too late were largely smothered by the comfortable apathy of the majority—comfortable because the unemployed were segregated in their slums, the Government was in safe, even saintly hands, and there was always Ottawa to look forward to. In Germany this middle-class complacence was profoundly shocked, first by defeat and revolution and then by the inflation which reduced vast sections of the middle-classes to the level of the proletariat. These shocks have produced a much livelier sense of unrest and menace, reflected in the post-war literature of Germany

Such novels as Renn's *After War*, Ernst von Salomon's *Outlaws*, Wassermann's *Etzel Andergast*, Lamprecht's *Regiment Reichstag*, Kästner's *Fabian*, are solider and more vivid than any English novel of the year, since they were written from a closer acquaintance with the reality which underlies the uneasy appearance of things. We turn to these books with an eagerness not accounted for by their literary interest. It is because, unconsciously, we feel we may have to suffer in the same degree that we read these books with an attention we do not give to equally well-written English novels, and because, though only in our sleep, we realise that something is happening in every country, not only in Germany and Russia, which affects western civilisation itself.

The Sleepwalkers is an account, by a German writer of extraordinary subtlety and intelligence, of the stages in our social and spiritual disintegration. It is a trilogy, of which the first part takes place in 1888 and the last in 1918. Part one, 'The Romantic,' is the story of Joachim von Pasenow, a soldier, and son of an East Prussian landowner. So far as he can, he has enclosed himself in the rigid tradition of his profession and caste, but his mind is vaguely uneasy. His friend Bertrand has left the army to become a successful business man: Joachim can only regard this as wrong and treacherous and yet he cannot dislike or dismiss the traitor.

Nor can he reconcile the division in himself between the 'pure' love he feels for Elisabeth and his sensual enjoyment of Ruzena. Very cleverly the novelist conveys a sense of the hollowness and insecurity of what appears the most rigid of European traditions. Part two (1903), 'The Anarchist,' is set in a different world, of clerks, shoddy music-hall artists, trade unions and Customs officials. The rottenness which is spreading invisibly through the social body is here more advanced. The central character is a bookkeeper, August Esch, a narrow intemperate man, irrationally obsessed by his ideal of social justice, which he pursues to the point where it drives Bertrand to suicide. In this Esch is a type of all those reformers, the chief effect of whose efforts is to bring nearer the destruction of an order seamed with irrationality and injustice.

Part three, 'The Realist,' is longer and technically more complicated. The main story turns on the career of an Alsatian deserter, Huguenau, from the moment when he leaves the German trenches to the day when, by various acts of swindling and violence, he finds himself safe on the road to a prosperous respectability. Four other narratives run through the book, in parallel sections. The collapse of the old Germany is now complete. Huguenau, the man without any standard of values, owning allegiance to no code except the business man's, utterly careless, provided they succeed, of

the moral and social consequences of his acts, is the only man who can snatch a profit for himself out of disorder and collapse. Like the earlier parts, this offers a solid and impressive picture of the age, astonishing in its depth and scope. It does more. In ten interpolated sections—which are not the easiest reading in the world, and of which it is sufficiently difficult to compress the argument since the writing is already as economical as lucid—Herr Broch traces the gradual disintegration of values from the start of the process at the Renaissance to the present day. In the mediæval scheme of values the spiritual authority of the Church was the apex to which all lesser values were referred and to which, at least in belief, they were subdued. Life was explained for the common man in terms of the Catholic faith. With the breakdown of the mediæval synthesis a process began which must continue to a final moral, intellectual, and spiritual anarchy. Reason has pushed out the bounds of the Infinite to the point where it can only be expressed by a mathematical symbol, and in place of one coherent and comprehensive value-system there are now any number of unrelated conflicting systems: the banker, the soldier, the business man, the writer, live each by his own code and none can relate his private good to another's, since there is no universal term of reference, no supreme value in which all men believe, and ultimately there are

as many standards of value as there are human beings. At this final stage, an anarchy in which only Huguenau triumphs, in this zero hour of our civilisation, men are oppressed by a sense of futility, our life, they say, has no meaning. Silence isolates each of us, 'each in his prison Thinking of the key.' (That is Mr. T. S. Eliot, and it is a very curious experience, and one which I suggest to you, to read *The Sleepwalkers* and *The Waste Land* side by side. In Herr Broch's language, Mr. Eliot has now become a romantic, the man who seeks safety in an outworn tradition.)

Now a new process must begin, the creation from the atoms of the old of a completely modern synthesis. The irrational forces of life must be poured into a new structure, shaped by the intellect. That is perhaps another way of repeating Vauvenargue's phrase: 'The passions have taught men reason.'

The final section of 'The Realist' foreshadows what must be the new community of life. This German novelist believes in the future, not to be enjoyed by those of us who are living now, 'in this hour between downfall and uprising, in this magical hour of birth and death.' There is nowhere in this book any faltering in belief, any of that hopelessness which seizes most of us at times, the fear that there may be nothing except the swing of the pendulum, nothing except civilisations

which destroy themselves and are painfully rebuilt. This is not its least virtue.

It is easy to believe that this is one of the most important novels which have appeared since the War. The firmness and delicacy with which Herr Broch writes are the reflection of an intellect of great power and subtlety. His imagination serves him as well when he is probing the mind and heart of any one of his many creatures as when the whole social order, or disorder, is his mark. With the exception of one or two passages—of which the meeting between Esch and Bertrand is the most noticeably a failure—the two aspects of his work are completely fused, so that each character is at once a living and individual creation and a significant part of the pattern of the whole. It would be a thousand pities to miss reading this novel. It is of the greatest value in assisting, no, compelling us to examine and re-order our thoughts and feelings about the life in which we are sunk and which defeats us because we can never see it as a whole.

We reviewers are always excusing ourselves for praising novels—though dear knows why we should

think we matter enough to anyone, or to literature, to need excuse—on the ground that there are so many good novels written nowadays. So there are—far too many. The number of novelists who are able to turn out thoughtful, well-written novels, in which the emotions of the characters are reasonably accounted for, is appalling. It is appalling to think of so much intelligence and feeling constantly in employment, year after year, to produce what? Bread and circuses—the bread for the novelist and the circuses for his readers, who return him to the library and forget him or put him on their shelves and forget him.

It is absurd for any novelist to say that this is what he intended when he began writing. He may have ceased to ask himself what he intended, he may look on each new novel he begins as a private adventure—for undertaking which he is well or ill paid. But if he says he is *satisfied* with this kind of life—this respectable breeding and raising for market of a book a year—he is either dead or lying. Unless he was always only a clever swindler, a literary confidence man making up stories to get your money, he must once have believed that he was going to write what would strike so fiercely on men's minds that they would never forget it—and never be the same again. No other sort of novel is worth writing, and no novelist worth reading at all but knows this, even when he is

busiest on the combing and trimming of another of his fine marketable books, which many will read and few long remember.

It is this knowledge that makes the writing of novels so sickening a business for us common novelists. Because we are clever enough to do so well we are too clever not to know how wretched our best is. We choose our subjects, we work on them honestly and carefully, and the result is another admirable unnecessary book. The uncommon novelist—of whom there are rarely more than two or three alive at once in any country—does not choose his subject, it chooses him; the result may be found unreadable by people who are accustomed to easier entertainments, but he has fulfilled his mission. He has produced what will go on working in men's minds. The rest of us write our good, bad or indifferent novels. He sends out a force which must go on until it is spent.

These two novels under my hand are the work of sincere admirable writers. There is thought in their books, care to write honestly about the relationships of men and women, insight, and the kind of quickness which saves them from blundering in their account of feelings. Neither of them, for the sake of achieving greater notice, would dream of making things out to be better or worse than he feels them to be. They have too much integrity, of a conscious

sort. What neither has is that unconscious, unwilling integrity which compels a writer, as D. H. Lawrence was compelled, to abandon himself wholly to an experience. Each keeps back something, it may be his reasoning mind, or his dignity, and is by so much outside the experience, able to view it, to give some account of it, to describe aspects, but not to know it at its quick. And be sure that it is because they are unable to abandon themselves, not because they have refused to. Many qualities are necessary to produce a good novel, and many novelists have enough of them, without having the passion which gets a living novel born.

Mr. Somerset Maugham is one of the most sensitive and intelligent of English novelists. In *Of Human Bondage*, he wrote a novel so nearly completely satisfying that one is always shocked by its omission from lists of Great Modern Novels. The reason may be in his own mind, which is an uncomfortable uneasy companion. It is possible to write of cruel painful things and become a popular novelist—if you ask for sympathy or if you interpose a warm comfortable wedge of what reviewers call ‘humanity’ between the event and your readers’ sensibilities. The man who wrote *Of Human Bondage* was too sore and angry to care what became of any sensibilities—the soreness was a fault in the book. From that book to *The Narrow Corner* is half a lifetime,

during which Mr. Maugham has become rich and successful without becoming complacent, and if he has taught himself to be smooth has not taught himself that since he is very comfortable everything is for the best in the best of all possible worlds. He admires goodness, kindness, and honesty, half loves and is half saddened by youth, hates pretentiousness, cruelty, and most of all stupidity: it is true that in reading his books we often like him best for what he hates—his loves are a little easy, but he puts his whole self into hating. In *The Narrow Corner* the happiest men are the doctor, who has no ambitions and no intimacies, and the disreputable scholar, sunk, past noticing what goes on, in his translation of *The Lusiads*. Of the two young men one kills himself when an ideal fails him and the other has been ruined by what is almost an accident—and if you are inclined to say that the fault was in Fred's lack of fineness there is Erik, who was good, kind, and intelligent, but it did not save him. In the end Mr. Maugham has been forced to the point when he will admire when he can, understand what he can, and pity when pity is the only valid emotion. He may even be willing to admit that there is less to be angry for than he once thought. This is one of the most civilised and intelligent novels of the year, as it is one of the most exciting, and written with that assurance and quietness which

a writer does not get for nothing and many writers as well known have never been able to afford.

Mr. Maurice Baring has as much quietness, but it comes, one feels, easier, as having less to subdue. I never read one of his novels without feeling thankful that I did not marry a diplomat. I should never have the courage now. I should know that when we had been married a little time he would start an immense dreary love affair with the wife of an ambassador living in another capital, and I should see him, tiresome fellow, seated at my dinner-table with a faraway look in his eyes. '*C*,' which is by much his best novel, has least to do with diplomats, and is very moving. What one likes in this writer is first his contempt for stupidity and looseness, and then his certainty that evil exists. When it comes to writing about a mean predatory woman he is quite clear that she is mean and predatory and does not try to persuade himself that she is good at heart (this is a great comfort at a time when so many novelists are determined to gain a reputation for a 'warm humanity,' which does no credit to their heads and not much after all to their hearts). Mr. Baring never raises his voice. When there is a genuine feeling under what he says this conversational tone slips it past the defences we erect against the unhappiness of other people. But it is not possible to believe of him that he has emotions which it has

cost him a great deal to subdue to this level of expression. Mr. Maugham's quietness seems the reward of severe discipline and the working on strong uncomfortable passions of an ironic self-regard. About Mr. Baring we feel that his politeness is due less to the discipline of living than to a trick—as if he had learnt to walk gracefully without caring to undertake any more than an hour's stroll. He is not deeply experienced, but he has the air of experience. His emotions—it would be foolish to speak of passion—are shockingly disciplined and polite.

There is very little feeling of any kind in *Friday's Business*. A young man falls in love, follows the girl he loves to Novograd, the capital of a Near Eastern State, finds established there as power behind the throne the master he ragged at Eton, loses his memory in an accident, falls in love with the wrong woman, recovers it and returns to his first love just before he is killed by the revolutionaries whom he has taught how to rag Eton masters. There is scarcely a real emotion in the book, but there are emotional gestures and some very light social comedy. Mr. Baring has a small museum of social types, and occasionally in his book one of them moves a limb, or sighs. Once when Patrick was speaking to Marie, I thought I heard a heart beat.

Intending to be unkind a friend said to me the other day : ‘Let’s see, you’re the Leavises’ only disciple outside Cambridge, aren’t you?’ I don’t know whether they would have been pleased. I was.

Culture and Environment

MR. EZRA POUND's pamphlet, *How to Read*, was needed and stimulating. It was also seriously unsatisfactory. There never was anyone like Mr. Pound for breaking in on the sacred clubrooms of literature with the intention of giving the members the dressing-down of their lives—and then making some cutting but perfectly irrelevant remarks about the wallpaper. This weakness excuses no one for having neglected his pamphlet. You could not want a clearer *exposé* of the disintegration of cultural standards in our time.

But it was necessary—and it is not done without a proper gratitude to Mr. Pound—for Mr. F. R. Leavis to write his counter-pamphlet, *How to Teach Reading*. When the cultural standards of a country have decayed you cannot mend them by slashing at the top of the tree as it rots. The root cause of the trouble lies in the fact that no provision is made at any stage of our educational system for developing critical sensibility. It was never so much needed. The flood of books compasses us round—no one can hope to read more than a fraction of them and no one need expect any guidance from

contemporary criticism, which has lowered its standards to admit a score of masterpieces a month. Academic methods of training taste—there are no academic methods of training taste. The schools are fettered by as futile and mind-cramping an examination system as any mandarin has invented. In the universities the English course might have been designed to avoid any opportunity for acquiring a critical apparatus. The student has an enormous amount of reading to get through and in addition he takes Anglo-Saxon, Middle English, and the History and Theory of Criticism. In some universities he writes a thesis as well. Unless he has of himself taste and discrimination, the valuing habit of mind, he will not acquire it in the process of reading for an Honours degree in 'English Language and Literature.'

The plight of the educated modern reader can usefully be discussed with reference to the appearance of Book Societies, which exist (as well as to make profits) to tell the Common Reader what to read. He ought to know by taste. That Book Societies can flourish is an odd marginal note on the condition of literary taste in our time.

It is not possible to discuss the need for an education in reading without reference to the state of contemporary culture. Where the habit of discrimination exists it must concern itself with the whole activity of man in his relation to his environ-

ment. It is not possible for a mind able to detect falseness in a poet's expression of emotion to fail to detect it where it exists in current modes of life. Thus the school-training of taste (where such training ought to begin) cannot confine itself to training a pupil to distinguish between the sound and the pretentious in writing. It must enable him to pass a like judgement on current values as exemplified in the press, the cinema, the pronouncements of public men, in brief, all those voices which, as soon as he is out of school, din in his ears and seek to exploit his emotional responses for their own ends.

The conclusion reached in *How to Teach Reading* is developed and made the basis for an educational method in *Culture and Environment*, which Mr. Leavis has written with Mr. Denys Thompson, senior English Master at Gresham's School. This book, invaluable to teachers of English subjects and educationalists generally, provides an indispensable preliminary to the training of literary taste. It makes the assumption, which no serious person will dispute, that the fostering of a true culture requires a refusal to accept our immediate environment at the value put on it by its creators and exploiters. There has been a break with tradition, what D. H. Lawrence called 'a gap in the continuity of consciousness.' Certain human values, by which we lived, have been destroyed, and the

immediate problem is how to restore his dignity to man before the machines which he has invented but does not control, run away with him—to war; dictatorship (of any class or interest), and all that these involve in moral and physical misery. Since, by the rapidity and violence of the industrial change-over, the continuity of experience has been broken, it becomes all the more vitally necessary for the writer, the man who speaks to and for his age, to maintain touch with what is valuable in the past at the same time that he helps to create the future by exalting one set of values and decrying others.

The creation of the future is not his conscious task. His conscious task is the rendering-up of his experience, and the way in which he does this, accepting or criticising his physical and intellectual environment, reveals him as a living force, or as a tradesman among tradesmen, selling the public what he hopes will take its fancy. The technique of mass-production—which in the present social order involves selling to as many persons as possible a standard article, not above the average of their tastes—has infected literature, and particularly fiction. It is easy for a novelist to ‘give the public what it wants’ and to gratify his impulse to self-expression at the same time. Between the advertisement which plays on your emotions to sell you a new car or face cream and the instalment of the popular novel which partners it in the columns of

women's magazines there is no essential difference in quality. Even the style is similar. In both cases the appeal is to emotions which can be easily roused and cheaply satisfied. In both, care has been taken not to offend the susceptibilities of the ordinary reader.

The same principle operates in fiction written at a slightly higher level than the women's magazines. The writer who has something to say which cuts across the lowest common denominator of semi-educated taste, the writer in revolt against his environment, will have only a limited appeal and suffer in his purse for it. 'The advantage it (the machine) brings us in mass-production has turned out to involve standardisation and levelling-down outside the realm of mere material goods. Those who in school are offered (perhaps) the beginnings of an education in taste are exposed, out of school, to the competing exploitation of the cheapest emotional responses; films, newspapers, publicity in all its forms, commercially-catered fiction—all offer satisfaction at the lowest level, and inculcate the choosing of the most immediate pleasures, got with the least effort.'

In this country there is no *enthusiasm* of the kind which made Charles Peguy's bookshop the forcing house for a new spirit in literature. It is impossible to suppose an English Peguy having so much influence. When writers cling together in this

country it is rarely evidence of a pure and ardent love of letters. You can therefore expect no help from writers as a body in any effort to change by criticising them the conditions, material and intellectual, in which they find themselves comfortable.

The future must—unless disaster overtakes us first—bring about a reversal of present conditions and the creation of new social forms. The machines must be directed so as to provide security and leisure for all instead, as now, of leisure for a few and security for none. But what use will a people in whom have been destroyed the instincts proper to life in an organic community—a community with a living and not only a mechanical relation to its environment—make of its leisure? The answer can only be given by its educators. The proper end of education is a human being in full control of himself, actively aware of his environment, able to judge it as it affects his moral and physical growth.

The immediate business of the intelligent men and women in our schools is the training of pupils in an active resistance to their environment. Give them a defence, in themselves, against the assault on their senses of all those interests which find their profit in exploiting the herd instincts in the individual. The simplest line of defence begins by developing an attitude of scepticism towards the best efforts of that really remarkable body of men, the advertising experts. An exposition of the

technique of advertising—its appeals, some crude, some very subtle, to fear, vanity, social snobbery—involves tracing out the interrelations of advertising and fiction, and advertising and the press. The claim of advertisers to have raised the standard of living opens the whole question of present standards in their effect on the quality of living.

Where our educational system fails is precisely that it makes no attempt to train the taste and sensibility which would reject commercialised fiction, vicious press stunts, and the rest. I spent roughly ten years absorbing the facts, possession of which eventually rewarded me with a First Class in English Language and Literature, without acquiring even the beginnings of a critical apparatus. Such contempt as attaches to me attaches equally to the system which made me what I then was and rewarded me, with a degree, for being it. The adoption of the educational methods outlined in this book will at least diminish the output from schools and universities of similarly de-educated wretches. At best it promises an educational renaissance.

For a further study of one dangerous and disintegrating force look at the Minority Press re-issue of Sir Norman Angell's *The Press and the Organisation of Society*. This admirable pamphlet puts concisely the case against the popular press. Popular journalism is one of those offences over

which every believer in democracy falls and hurts himself. The Freedom of the Press—that is, the freedom granted to certain newspaper proprietors to debase the emotional and intellectual currency of millions of people. Not—or not inevitably—from delight in viciousness but because the easiest way to be rich is to be popular, and the easiest way to be popular is to appeal to the most primitive emotions and impulses, to shriek 'Make Germany Pay' rather than to publish the painful fact that the war had ruined the lot of us and that no one nation could 'pay' for it. It pays better to fling hysterical abuse ('foul jokers,' 'sexual indeterminates,' 'posturers,' 'yellow cowards') at the 275 young men who carried the so-called 'pacifist' resolution in the Oxford Union Society, than to set out the circumstances in which war can seem to young men disgusting, and that old Moloch, 'For King and Country,' unworthy of indiscriminating respect. (The supply of harpies who give away white feathers is apparently inexhaustible.)

It is difficult to read Sir Norman Angell and remain calm. Nothing could be more primitive than the emotions roused in the minds of decent people who—during the autumn of 1919, when a private conference of experts which included Mr. J. M. Keynes and officials of the Supreme Economic Council had been called to avert the famine threatening vast areas of the Continent—opened a copy of

the *Daily Mail* to find the conference 'reported' under these headlines: Stolen Cow Huns, Milch Cow Germans, The Cow Delegates, The Cows They Stole, Well-fed German Babies, Justice to French Babies.

There is not much difference in emotional quality between 'Lynch Rothermere' and 'Hang the Kaiser.' Both are 'first thoughts.' The trouble is that the man who feels moved to lynch Rothermere is in a minority—and too intelligent to suppose that a society is changed by assassinating one of its rulers. The 'Hang the Kaiser' enthusiast is not troubled with second thoughts. And there you have it. The Freedom of the Press is the opportunity of sensation-mongers and hooligans. Yet, his first rage of disgust over, the intelligent believer in democracy must continue to disbelieve in suppression.

Sir Norman's own suggestions for countering the evil are less convincing than his argument. So long as the units which compose 'democracy' are un-educated and emotionally undisciplined, bred and maintained cheaply and rottenly, so long will they prefer a cheap, rotten, and frivolous newspaper to a thoughtful and responsible one. Back we come to the same place. Create awareness, train sensibility, educate taste. A man trained to use his mind will—use it.

This was written as an introduction to the book—called Tale Without End—written by a young German girl in England, in 1934. I wrote at this length because the book itself was short and we wanted to stretch it as much as possible. And because the publisher thought it a good thing to explain events which had made this young Prussian woman an exile from her country. Thus it happened that there was not very much in the introduction about the author of Tale Without End, and a great many of my own observations of pre-Hitler Berlin. This mattered the less that the book was part of her own story. It was a first instalment of the much longer book I was anxious for her to write. The generation to which she belongs—children during the War, to whom it meant hunger and the half-comprehended despair of elders, and who came to adolescence at the demoralising period of the Inflation—must have learned, perhaps unconsciously, a conviction that nothing is safe. That one should be prepared for anything, for sudden happiness, or for poverty, civil war, exile. I wanted her to record the experience of this generation : she did this in her second book, Restless Flags. Both books ought to be read. The young Germany of which she wrote no longer exists. It was our friend, and it is only polite in us to remember it for a moment.

The Youngest Brother

IN the autumn of 1931 I was at Scarborough and attended a session of the Labour Party Conference. It was a more than usually dispiriting business, since delegates and Executive were oppressed by the betrayal of the Party, at that time first made public, by three of its leaders. Some at least of the men and women on the platform must have expected it, yet with one exception they seemed dazed tired men, in no heart to fight back—to defend, yes, with a redeeming patience, but not to fight. After the morning session I was standing outside, bewildered myself, watching the bewildered busy faces of the delegates, some known to me, and the secretary of the local Party ran up to me with the words: ‘A young German is here, I wish you would speak to her.’ I turned where he was nodding, and saw a girl whom at first sight I thought a schoolgirl in a shabby coat, with a soft hat pulled over her eyes. ‘This is Fräulein Linke.’ Now, I am afraid of strangers, but some quality in the young German, a mingling of shyness and an eager jaunty courage, took me quickly. I heard myself saying that she must come to Whitby to see me and I made arrangements with one to bring her.

To look at, she was, is, the goose-girl of German fairy-tales—tall, slender, rosy-cheeked, with hair like yellow silk and eyes a fine clear blue. In talk with her I soon found that she was more like the Youngest Brother, who sets out, with no better provision than a cake baked by his mother, to seek his fortune. With some ridiculously small sum in marks she had come to England to see, she said, what her ‘English comrades’ were thinking and doing. Like the Youngest Brother, she found friends everywhere. Doors opened to her knock; in poor houses she had been given half the bed of the eldest daughter; everywhere there were people who talked to her, took pains to show her some fragment of the English pattern, and sent her on her way with friendly words. As in the fairy-tales simple and noble both recognise the Youngest Brother under any disguise, and wish to help him.

She spoke admirable English, and sitting in my room she said seriously that she loved England. But she was disappointed in the Labour Party. ‘Why should they sit sad and glum on that platform repeating: We must be calm, keep calm, do not become excited, and all will be well? Why don’t they wave their arms and shout: We are Socialists, let us fight for Socialism!?’ ‘Partly because they are English,’ I suggested. ‘Oh, no,’ she said, with energy and growing scorn, ‘I have talked to English

men and women of all classes and they are not as if dead since ten years.'

Here is the moment I could write that subservience is not among the qualities which made friends for her everywhere on her English journey. With politeness and with unshakable conviction she upholds her opinions and beliefs in any company. Her air of gentleness is only part of the deception practised innocently by the Youngest Brother, whom it aids in getting his way. When she left Whitby she was on her way to London, with a letter to a Welsh member of the House of Commons. Like any Welshman he has an answer to everything and no respect for authority. No one can be sorry that he met his match.

In February of the next year, 1932, I went to Berlin. The situation of the Weimar Republic was by now serious and after listening to several speeches by Social Democratic leaders I was able to ask my friend: 'Why do they content themselves with repeating: We must be calm, keep calm, do not become excited, and all will be well?' I forget her answer, but since, like all the younger Social Democrats she was already disillusioned about her leaders, it was something that need not be repeated now that so many of those leaders have suffered for their weakness.

She was then working on the *Deutsche Volkswirt* and as a free-lance journalist. She had a tiny flat

in the west end of Berlin, of which she was very proud, and no wonder. It was a good flat. In London she could not have had anything half so pleasant at the low rent. Naturally she lived sparingly, and I felt sometimes a little anxious when I had my evening meal with her that I was enjoying next day's meals, too. I felt also very happy. For the first time since the War I had the feeling of the months before the War, the excitement, the burning confidence of those night-long talks in which we were preparing ourselves for the new age. I felt almost like a ghost, come back to listen to myself talking as when I lived. That was so strange—since I had long since grown used to thinking of myself as the only living one of a section, left behind when the others went on—I cannot describe it.

These young Germans, Lilo Linke and her friends, talked, argued, believed, in our mood of 1913 and with the same joy and passion. They felt the same certainty that they were going to create a new world, the same scorn of all those whom they suspected of not being willing to change everything, the same anger against social injustice, the same faith. Why, they even used, in another tongue, the same words. At one moment I could swear I heard a voice I have not heard since 1916—but that was too good to be true.

There were differences. Behind us in 1913 lay an unbroken era of peace and prosperity: behind

these young Germans who replaced us lay defeat, hunger, the long-drawn agony of the Inflation. But I am not sure that the differences were apparent at that time. The likeness was too close and sharp. Also there is another way in which we of Class 1913 and they are alike, and perhaps this rubs out all differences of age and race, and explains why in Lilo's small room in Berlin I felt that I had come home after a long absence. They, too, had in a few months to find out that they had been abandoned and that the future to which they looked would belong to others. She writes of her friends: 'Our whole outlook was directed towards the future, the future only—we were like children who were later forced to grow up within a week.' I could write that myself, of my own section.

Looking back to those months of 1932 I see that the chief difference—in the end perhaps it is the only one, but it is not trivial—between them and us was in the sharpened seriousness with which they felt party politics. It was inevitable, having regard to the realities of the time, and it marks the period. I remember an evening when I went with Lilo and another Social Democrat, a young trades union official, to visit two Communists, living in one of the workers' districts of north Berlin. Their flat was even smaller than Lilo's, a room and half a room, very new and clean, holding only the essential minimum of furniture. Fortunately they

were young and very thin. They were very poor as well. In the beginning of the evening the Germans were anxious to make their English guest feel at home. One way they had thought of was to tune in to an English station on their wireless set. Through a storm of atmospherics a few words were suddenly distinguishable: ‘This afternoon their Majesties the King and Queen left London for . . .’

To cover this failure I asked a question about the coming Presidential election. In a few moments they had abandoned entirely the politeness suitable to an argument meant to instruct the foreigner—and Communist and Social Democrat were taking the skin off each other’s backs with hot words. ‘The Social Democrat leaders are not Socialists, don’t believe it. In 1919 they called out the army under Imperialist officers to shoot down the only Socialists and Republicans in the country. Since then they’ve sold out to the Right over and over again, at each crisis. All they think about is their jobs. It’s owing to them and their treachery that democracy is going to be defeated in Germany.’ ‘It’s owing to you if it happens! Do you know’—this to me—‘that on the 9th of August last year the Communists actually voted with the Nazis against Brüning? Think of it. *They voted with the Nazis!* And to talk of treachery!’ I sat a little bewildered, feeling the weight of so much anger and bitterness

like blows. It came to me that they had learned bitterness too soon. After a time, the young wife went out of the room and came back with a few sandwiches on a plate and handed them round, with a little air of anxiety.

Two other evenings from that spring of 1932 remain in my memory—one of the cultured cosmopolitan Berlin that no longer exists in the same form, and the other of an older simpler kinder Germany, the Germany for which our grandfathers felt so much romantic affection, and which has outlived the War and for all I know will outlive even the Third Reich—I hope it at least. The first evening is a dinner-party in a house on the edge of Berlin, near the pine-woods. The house is in the new German manner, very plain, solid and dignified, with wide rooms and many windows letting in light and air. My host is a Jew, his views, so far as I understand them, those of a Gladstonian Liberal—his wife is gentle, intelligent, cultured, wise.

Among the guests an American tries to persuade us that violence and unreason are gaining ground in Germany so quickly that they may even triumph: none of the Germans agrees with him and one, a banker, drives home his argument with a passage from Shakespeare—bringing us round to another argument, on the value of translating great poetry. Here one breathes an air fastidiously cleared of the

passions proper to militant nationalism—without ceasing to be Germans these few people have become good Europeans. Precisely that seems to have been their crime and the cause why their country had to rid itself of them.

The second evening gave me, as I now think, something by which to hope. A small apartment furnished in the worst of German taste, shabby and over-heated, much noise and laughter and eating of curious salads and slices of sausage, and then, for hours and hours, music, playing, singing, and endless talk about music—just such an evening as any at any time in the hundred years before the War would to an Englishman have seemed strongly German, kind, without anxious pretensions, a little ridiculous in its passion for music, almost simple, to be liked because of the qualities wrapped together in the word *gemütlich*. The Weimar Republic might never have succeeded a crushing War, and Adolf Hitler need not have been born—in this room neither had any existence. It is possible that Germany will never cease from anxious strife until the two seemingly irreconcilable impulses—the impulse to cherish and absorb the culture of other countries, to become European, and the other impulse to cleave only to the good German pleasures, to live in that kingdom which runs from the fairy-tales to *Der Ring des Nibelungen*—are fused in a Reich which goes beyond both.

This is something no one, or no stranger, can know. But I know this—that the young Germans with whom I was at this time had between their hands the spark of a new Germany very different from the one which has triumphed. They had a passionate wish to know, understand, and grow to friendship with their late enemies. They would not think of the War or of what had been lost. Their thoughts when they visited Douaumont were turned all to the future: ‘What did equality of rights mean to us? We would not raise a hand for it. We wanted to live, to work, to build a world in which was freedom and bread for all.’

I should like to say this again and again—here was a new Germany, eager, friendly, which owed nothing to any leader, which looked ardently for the fulfilment of the ideals of social freedom and equality, so ill-served by the founders of the Weimar Republic, and which has since been murdered by its enemies. Not every one of its enemies was moved by hatred of it. More were indifferent or ignorant. In 1932 it still lived. I saw it and talked with it. I know that it existed and that its temper and spirit were what Europe would have done well to notice in time.

In March, 1932, it was perhaps already too late. More and more the children of another spirit were thrusting their way to the front. As far back as 1924-5, Nazi audiences in Munich were yelling

themselves senseless at the name of Stresemann. Even a foreigner could not miss the extraordinary skill with which the Nazi movement was being conducted so that *der Führer*, to whom already homely shrines had been set up in the houses of some of his followers, made his entrance on platforms at the highest moment of an emotional tension which his appearance turned into something between a revivalist meeting and a cup final. Everything that could sharpen the emotion was pressed to its service—songs, banners, and the dead lying in the earth in France and East Prussia. There were no subtleties in the gospel preached at the meetings. The only consistent and the most articulate note was of hate—hate of the Jew, of the internationalist, the Liberal, of the Marxist, of the pacifist. Whatever the spring of this hate, what humiliation, what injury, done to Germany under the shield of a mean Peace, is no acceptable excuse for those who used it. It is not pleasant to watch an audience of ten thousand human beings transformed into slavering hysterics, nor to listen while decent young men sing: '*Wann Judenblut vom Messer spritzt.*' (*When Jewish blood spurts under our knives.*) In 1932 it was as hard, in spite of the evidence, to believe that victory would reward such tactics, as that a tolerable new age could spring from this mud. The Third Reich sprang from it.

It is true that my eager young friends were

defeated as long ago as June, 1919, when many of them were at school. The treaty of Versailles was dictated neither by reason nor humanity, and it is not surprising that after no more than four years devoted to slaughter Europe was deficient in these virtues. What would be surprising, and a miracle, would be a war that ended in a spirit of goodwill. My sharpest insight into the responsibility of my own and other countries for the growth of the Nazi teaching came to me through no Nazi, but it came through a young Social Democrat. He said in a quiet reminiscent voice:

‘The only thing I remember about the War is seeing my mother cry. She had hold of my arm and she was saying over and over again: “Oh, your poor arms, where shall I get milk for you? Oh, your arms, your arms!”’ But it was *after* the War, and she had thought the blockade would stop *at once*, and when it was the same, still the blockade and no food, she cried. During the War—no tears. After the War—tears every day. That was very funny—you think so? She has died in the Inflation, because she could not understand anything any more.’

There are funnier things than the reflection that it was on this morass of useless suffering, and on the despair and bewilderment of many simple people, that the foundations of Nazi Germany were raised. Again a year and a half later it was not so

funny when, after many unanswered letters, I had news that this boy had been taken away at night by S.A. men and so beaten by them with steel rods that he cried to be killed. He was a fair-haired, not very intelligent young German, with a slow smile. He was seventeen at that time.

These young Germans, to whom democracy was a living faith, were also betrayed by their leaders, to many of whom it was at best a form of words remembered from 1848 and never revised. It would not be worth while to remember how the Social Democrat party in Germany, with the other parties of the moderate Left, shuffled to its death, if it were not to remind ourselves that freedom dies quickly in timid hands. From its beginning the Weimar Republic was in danger, less by the hatred of its enemies than by the weakness and coldness of its official supporters. There was warmth for it in the hearts of many men and women but these were not called up to defend it. Democracy in Germany died by default.

Reading the history of the years after November, 1918, you could believe that the parents of the Republic were ashamed of their child from the moment it was born. Indeed that it must have been born in spite of them! Their sternest measures were reserved for the extremists of their own side, against whom they did not hesitate to use the military strength of the most reactionary Right.

Towards the others, their life-long enemies, they showed a mildness that was never far from becoming ridiculous, as if at any moment they would beg forgiveness for having ventured to form a republic—which in any case they did not venture to rule without relying on the help of officials to whom the Weimar system was odious. Judges were allowed to show a fatherly gentleness towards Nazi rebels, and even to disregard the government's decrees against them. University professors and secondary schoolmasters were permitted openly to teach disrespect for the existing constitution and to foster a Nationalism of the most violent and anti-democratic colour.

I recall that I asked a Social Democrat, a district-leader in the Reichsbanner, why the Coalition government gave Nazi and Nationalist organisations so many opportunities to make inflammatory speeches and to work openly against the Weimar Republic. His reply—that the government wished to create abroad the impression that only Treaty revision would strengthen the moderates against the extremists—shocked me in revealing to what lengths of self-deception a good Social Democrat would go to comfort himself. It is possible that he believed it: it is possible that the impulse existed in the minds of certain of his leaders. But only as the gesture made by an irresolute and already defeated man to persuade himself and others that

his inaction is a measure of deep cunning. That it had any other practical significance I do not believe. The evidence is overwhelming that the Republican authorities neither appreciated the strength of the menace of National Socialism nor knew how to combat it. As late as the autumn of 1931 the Prussian Minister of the Interior, Severing, a Social Democrat, was assuring his followers that the hoses of the fire-brigade could deal with the Nazi troops.

Such levity is more forgivable than the attitude, the methods, which from the beginning the leaders of the Left adopted to support their cause. In their anxiety to be 'correct,' to persuade their opponents that whatever the Social Democrat party was it was nothing that need alarm the most aggressive supporter of the existing social order, they wiped out of their words and gestures every vital quality of a democracy. As early as the first meeting of the national assembly in 1919 it had become clear to the old régime that it had nothing to fear, that it was going to be left undisturbed in its strongholds in the executive and the judiciary. And having no flame in their own hearts, these timid Republicans could not kindle it in others. It is surprising that their democratic Republic lasted even fourteen years, seeing that during the whole of that time it resisted every opportunity given to it to compel the imagination of the people. Its attitude was as freezingly correct as that of the leaders of the

British Labour Party towards hunger-marching unemployed. It left the banners and the songs to its bitterest opponents and contented itself, but not alas its followers, with the recital of a creed in which the living impulse had died. It was as far as 1848 from the needs and passions of 1919.

Yet to feel surprise that it lasted fourteen years is to do less than justice to those hundreds of thousands, no, millions, of men and women who loved this Republic which in their hearts lived with a passion it never had in fact. These cherished an ideal, a spirit. Their leaders, or those who had the power, kept their enthusiasm for the machinery of a Party, which functioned with admirable efficiency to reproduce itself, and only broke down when it was confronted with human passions it had not known how to evoke and forces it had not attempted to control. This would be bearable if it were not for the deaths.

The last day on which, had it been anything more vital than a system of cogs and wheels, the Social Democrat leadership might yet have saved itself and the Republic, was on the 20th of July, 1932, the day on which Herren Braun and Severing were turned out of their posts by the proverbial lieutenant with three men acting under orders from Herr von Papen. Severing had even known for some few days that the *coup* was preparing and he had rejected all suggestions of defence. When the

blow fell, none of the Social Democrat leaders was prepared with a counter stroke. To the leading trades union functionaries Papen's action appeared first as a possible menace to the approaching elections for the Reichstag, which nothing must be allowed to disturb. While the rank and file of the Party, and the members of the Reichsbanner and the other Republican organisations, waited, expecting orders, the leaders had met and decided against taking any action until 'the situation becomes serious.' Since their opponents had already defied the constitution and were plotting openly to overthrow it, so much correctness was unfortunate. Unfortunate in its results, certainly. You could say that if the Left leaders were wedded to Democracy they most shamefully neglected their lawful wife in favour of their mistress Legality.

On the evening of the 20th of July my mind fled back to an evening in March, in Berlin, when a mixed company of Germans, Americans, and English gathered in the offices of the *Chicago Daily News* to listen to the results of the Presidential election. The Germans there, being all members of the Left and Centre, were anxious for the success of Hindenburg. As a good Social Democrat, my friend Lilo was anxious. She sat at one end of the room close against the loud speaker, to take down the figures as they came through. 'Ah'—a radiant smile—'*absolute Mehrheit*'—with frowns—'*keine*

absolute Mehrheit.' An English journalist listening began to tease her about her 'Socialist comrade, Hindenburg.' 'Doesn't it occur to you,' he laughed, 'that there is something very wrong and uncertain in the position of your Party when it has to call out its followers in support of an old reactionary, in the pockets of the East Prussian *Junkertum*? Step after step you've retreated—into the arms of the Junkers! How do you people like going to the poll hand in hand with Junkers? What good do you expect it to do you?'

I looked at Lilo, who was the youngest in the room, her yellow hair tossed back, her cheeks flaming, red on white, and thought now of the many thousands of men and women who were willing to offer their lives, if these were demanded of them, for the protection of the wretched Weimar Republic. To the criticisms of the English journalist, and he had a great many, she defended vehemently the Social Democrat policy—'What else can we do? Hindenburg has sworn to uphold the constitution. He will not break his word. He is an upright man. We *must* support him.'

We left there towards two in the morning, when Hindenburg's success was certain. I could not help doubts: 'Are you *sure* that you and your friends are right to believe in Hindenburg?'

'We *must* believe in him. He has *sworn*.'

With little confidence, I reflected that I had so

far escaped being summoned by the Executive of the Labour Party to vote for a reactionary Tory. One never knows, in politics.

Before very long, this trusted ally of Social Democracy had dismissed his faithful Chancellor, Brüning, at the bidding of the East Prussian land-owners, and replaced him by the reactionary Papen. The 20th of July came next.

It is natural to feel some bitterness against weak leaders, since their failure is visited hardest on others. But if it is just to say that my friends were betrayed by their leaders, what word is left too bitter for the declared enemies of the Weimar State, who for years—and in order to stimulate them to a prolonged struggle—jected into their followers the poisons of hatred and militant nationalism—hatred of the Jew, of Liberalism, of democracy, of the Marxist, and of the territorial clauses of the Treaty, for which, as well as for the defeat of 1918, all these other objects of their hate were assumed to be responsible? It is true that violence and unreason make a quicker appeal than reason. It is also true that a movement which engages the hearts and souls of millions does not appeal only to their impulses of hate and vanity. The Nazi crusade succeeded in gaining followers because with banners and trumpets it promised to do everything the existing rulers were only too clearly failing to achieve—it promised social justice to

the workers, security to the other classes, and a future glorious victory to wash out the memory of defeat. It appealed to young men whom the doctrinaire weakness of the Left repelled or disappointed. It had other, more powerful supporters. And it seasoned its promises with hate, a seasoning which intoxicates more quickly and furiously than any.

This is not the time, nor am I competent, to judge what benefits Herr Hitler has conferred on his country which make less of the wounds that all can see. It is certain that not all those who would have been willing to die in defence of the Weimar Republic, and not all those who died, were under the illusion that it was more than a makeshift democracy. They clung to it less because they admired it or had any hope that it would turn into a true democracy than because it represented a measure of freedom they feared to lose.

Their fears were just. A dictatorship, of whatever colour, must be master over the minds, as over the bodies, of its subjects. All voices must repeat the same creed, all arms make the same respectful gesture. This is true whether the dictatorship is a closely personal affair, as it might be in a South American republic, or whether the tyranny is exercised in the name of an absolute state. The essential condition of dictatorship, lacking which it ceases, is obedience without ques-

tion. The odd thing is, not that there are some people to whom blind obedience to a man-god or a state-god offers a mystical satisfaction, but that others can be found to deny that dictatorship and freedom of conscience and opinion are incompatible goods. I understand but do not applaud the man who says that a private conscience cannot be allowed to criticise the arbitrary decrees of the leader, the state-in-person, still less to vote against them or oppose them. I cannot even understand a man who believes, or affects to believe, that a people becomes stronger by sacrificing its right to argue down the Devil himself, if the Devil should happen to become the head of the state. It is a right for which, in this country, men have died. We are not, or not yet, a servile people, to take pleasure in obedience for its own sake.

It is natural that some cruelty should accompany the establishment and maintenance of a dictatorship. If bodies and spirits are to follow one pattern some of them will need to be broken to fit. This then is the opportunity of scoundrels and ill men—such as in Germany have been used to flog political prisoners with steel rods, to blind, to castrate, or to butcher men, usually at night, perhaps with some instinct that such acts need darkness.

Without extravagance, one may suppose some natural national preference—one nation preferring to use castor oil, exile, or simple shooting, another

leaning to wholesale massacres, another to mutilation and bestiality. One can even imagine that in a deeply civilised country, as England, the physical brutality would be reduced to a minimum, and the preference given to moral and economic pressure. Perhaps this is only a natural vanity, to be corrected by the event. It is in no mood of pride but with deep shame that an Englishman, a lover of Germany, hears of the measures taken to enforce obedience and uniformity on Socialists, pacifists and Liberals. It may be that unauthorised cruelty is not a necessary part of the process, and that the essential nature of dictatorship is made plainer in a letter written by Mr. Wickham Steed to *The Times* on January 23, 1934, in which he asks the sympathy of the civilised world for Carl von Ossietzky, a distinguished Liberal journalist and writer, dying in the concentration camp at Sonnenburg of the means taken to purge him of his opinions.

Long before I left Germany in 1932 it had become clear that only a miracle could save Lilo and her friends from being swept aside by the gathering waves of violence. In less than a year, in February, 1933, she was writing:

‘We all are desperate here, our hopes are gone, we are only expecting dictatorship or civil war or even both. I feel confused and tired and in some way deceived. By whom, by the others or by myself? Since ten days I am trying to be calm.

Marches, demonstrations, flags, my neighbours' wireless—voices shouting through the walls, a people mad crying a hundred thousand at one time 'heil, heil,' like wild animals. Every notice in the papers is a provocation, every march hurts the heart. We are working hard in the office to record every event and every decree, for the future to read, and every word I write is bitter to me. In the end one has either to commit suicide or try to handle the situation, but I am too young and without experience to learn it quickly. There is not one of my friends who is not involved with it. That is the worst: this uncertainty which doesn't allow us to see three hours ahead. Every ring of the telephone, every knock at the door, may begin that which would not be bearable. The faces of my friends are white, shadows under their eyes, even if we speak of something pleasant or indifferent, our minds are going on behind this conversation with fear. We are like strangers here: the people's festivals are not ours, the songs, the speeches, the words, the future. Suddenly we are cut off from everything round us, life has been taken out of our hands, we feel old and tired and don't have the comfort that those coming after us will carry on our work and ideas.'

A month later she wrote: 'I was thinking very often of England—every day—but did not feel strong to write. I am happy if the day is only dull

—often it is unbearable. Now I am making a plan for the rest of my life. When the fate of our paper is decided I shall rather soon come to England to look for a chance to live. Shall I not be able to write little articles in English? and so I hope to go on. Well, I shall fear nothing for the future, having here no present and the past wasted. I promise already to-day not to show myself to you if I am once being afraid or dull.'

She stayed two or three months in Germany after the *Deutsche Volkswirt* had been suppressed. Before I saw her again I had seen and talked to a few of the German refugees in London. None of those I knew were destitute, but they were living, as Lilo said later of herself, 'from my sixpence to my mouth.' A young lawyer, nephew of a judge who had had the temerity to give a decision against Hitler only a short time before his triumph; a musician who, as a Jew, was prevented from working in his profession, and so became an exile from two countries at once. They lived in comfortless furnished houses and rooms, and in the evenings visited each other to drink coffee and to make light together of the rubs of exile and the coldness of unfamiliar rooms. I could not help wishing that all these outposts of a culture different from ours could be called in, and sent to found some colony in some much smaller provincial city, which they would humanise with their love of music, their

eager observing minds, and their genius for conversation, which needs only three or four friends and a pot of coffee to put out its happiest flowers.

These were the fortunate ones, who had still something by which to hope. There were many more whom the hastily-formed committees tried to save from despair. The Labour Party Conference at Hastings was haunted by the ghost of German Social Democracy, in the shape usually of a young lawyer or doctor, with a pale intelligent face, and no money. What did these *revenants* hope for from their 'English comrades' assembled?

Then one brought me a letter from a young Socialist in Germany. 'No one has harmed us. I was forced to give up my course. Since my mother is half a Jew I could not get work even if I was taking my degree well. So on my mother's birthday the neighbours were very kind and brought presents that they were sorry. C. (his older sister) is dismissed from her position but that is because a man must have the work. So she is saying to me: "Perhaps that is right but now you, Franz, must work for us or we starve." So now I must forget all I believe with my heart that we should teach people to think and to be free, and I should become a Nazi. Or perhaps should I join with the Communists to work with them for another tyranny, this time like Russia. I would feel happy if you would show this letter to an English boy of

my age and write to me what he says, but write that it shall be a wedding that we are discussing. As the Nazis say, We are living in historic times. I think it is easier to make an opinion of historic times if one is not living in them. So perhaps he shall say something to help me.'

What could anyone say to him? What help?

That evening as I came home I was tired and very late. I knew that Lilo would have been waiting in my flat since the afternoon, and all the time as I hurried to finish my work I was thinking that I must do this and that, and say this, to give her courage. Never had London seemed more inhuman and exhausting than it did that evening. I stood a moment or two in the corridor before I opened the door and went in. There in my room, radiant as the day, stood the Youngest Brother. She did not expect or need comfort. She was like Ulysses, pleased to have a story to tell.

1934.

This, too, was written to be spoken. It accounts for the somewhat disagreeable rhetoric, the lifted arm and voice. I could not get rid of them without writing the whole thing again, and that—since I agreed not to arrange my past to suit my present, and since my mind has few virtues except it is a virtue in a mind to go on moving—would not be fair. I could not if I tried keep the emphasis in the same places if I rewrote it. I am as sharply certain as ever I was—this is one thing I shall never alter in—that the freedom to think, to enquire, and to speak is a human need which the writer, more than other people, cannot afford to have taken from him. But I am less sure than I was in 1934 that every writer must descend into the arena and fight there in the dust. Certain writers can find in their own experience an organisation of reality which the arena would only confuse. Writers of this quality are rare. There are plenty of writers who behave as though they possessed this quality and must be excused for climbing into an ivory tower. Usually they deceive only themselves. We can trust the conscience of the genuine writer to know what is the proper thing for him to do. It is impudent to ask him to do something we think he should do.

In any event I am less willing than I was, even so short a time since, to judge, to praise, to condemn. I have too many sins of my own at the table.

The Defence of Freedom

It must be very difficult for anyone who cannot remember what before-the-War was like to realise fully the present. There are times when I wish I were a few decades older so that I should have as well some memory of the ordinary man's state of mind in the mid-Victorian moment. An age of unbroken security and progress lay, he thought, all before him. I cannot summon up that moment, since already at the time when I had begun to think about things other than myself, the imaginations of the young were quick with a new age. Change, we said, is on the order of the day—and but that all our expectations were joyful ones, but in the end there was no joy, and for many of us only death, we were right. Change is still on the order of the day, with this added—that now we look for it, some with fear, others expecting a victory. That light confidence of before-the-War is vanished, and if anyone is confident it is as a soldier is confident in the righteousness of his cause but not in his own chances. Then, we did not conceive change except as an advance. We know now, because we have seen it happen, that the social order of a whole

nation can be turned backwards. Some of us have talked with writers exiled from their country. One of them used a phrase I cannot forget.

'Yesterday I did not know that to-day would make me a poor exile.'

'You are safe here.'

'I do not feel safe anywhere, now that the ground is moving,' he answered them.

We are being taught to look for the roots of to-morrow under the economic ferment of to-day. One can do this too narrowly. At this moment we have a plague of little Calvins, using the economic interpretation of events to measure their own shadows. Used as a scalpel it is most excellent, and can uncover the nerves even of a living body. A writer can scarcely do without it. How people live and where and by what means they get their food, clothes, and leisure, is as important to us to know as their shapes. Whether a man did murder because he was hungry or because he hates is of no moment to his hangman. To the artist nothing about him is so important.

Nor, because he can examine them, is the artist outside the conditions shaping his world. A writer born in 1900 cannot feel or think in the mood of the Renaissance. He is affected, deeply and subtly, by drawing his breath in a society in which human forces are overmatched by the power generated in machines. No doubt this would mean less if the

new machines had done no more than take the place in our human economy of the first hammer or the first wheel. The change is too great. The wheel, the hammer, served their users. We others do not so much use our machines as, blindly and with increasing despair, suffer them to bind on us ten evils for one they remove. I can put a girdle round the earth in an aeroplane, and to-morrow the aeroplanes may destroy London, Paris, Berlin, Vienna, bringing our world down in flames. When the last century began famine was an act of God and want was a reality. To-day, men starve and shiver in the midst of an abundance of all things. Why is this? Why, the machines must pay their way, though a multitude of human beings starve, and a greater multitude—in which count yourselves—are cheated of the leisure they could use. Such a reversal of the right human order of things could only take place in a society in which human values are less respected than the values created by the machines. How less respected? Why, if we have a fine powerful machine we take pains to house it well and to feed and doctor it. Yet to-day, in every town and city in this land, the minds and the fine powerful bodies of young men are rotting from neglect. Which is the more respected—the machines we tend or the men we let rot? What kind of a to-morrow, can you tell me, will be born from these loins.

In a society degraded by the degradation of very many of its members, you would expect anger and apathy—you will find both, but more apathy, in a terrible book, the *Memoirs of the Unemployed*. Also you would expect a religion of especial comfort to the poor and oppressed—in the first century it was Christian communism, and those who call themselves Communists to-day can count older witnesses on their side—and, opposing it, a counter-religion which embodies, but in its crudest form, the dominant philosophy of the day. It is at this last that I want you to look—the closer since it rests on the authority of a great thinker and writer. Whether the artist by his work gives direction and a form to-morrow, or whether to-morrow enters into him as a quickening spirit, is a knot I shall not try to undo. The economic interpreters of history are not in two minds about it. I am anxious only that you should note how readily the subtlest and noblest conception of an artist can be turned to gross uses in a society able to give abundance of life to less than a company of its regiment of souls. It is true that Fascism discovered it had a philosophy only after it had discovered that it had teeth and claws, yet it is true also that in the beginning was the word. A mystical Hegelian nationalism had filtered through many minds during the century that elapses between the publication of the *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts* and the march on

Rome. Hegel believed and said that the national State is the ultimate form of the social organism. It is the final reality, and in it are absorbed and through it are made manifest the acts and impulses of the single members of this all-embracing authority. The individual has no significance greater than his significance as a unit in the State, no function more imperative than the function he can perform for the State, no loyalty which can supersede his loyal willingness to serve and sustain with his body, mind and spirit the supremacy of his State.

Leave aside for a moment the denial, implied and many times stated by Fascists, of any international or supra-national authority which might try to speak for all men as though they were the children of one Father. Think only that this is a conception of the individual flatly opposed to the democratic conception. You may think that I misrepresent a creed which some writers and artists have found it possible to accept. It will be better if I quote the Italian philosopher Gentile, an Hegelian: Both Fascism and nationalism regard the State as the foundation of all rights and the source of all values in the individuals composing it.' Or, if you think the master better worth hearing than his dog, Mussolini speaks himself: ('Fascism conceives of the State as an absolute, in comparison with which all individuals or groups are relative, only to be conceived of in their relation to the State,') and

again: 'Whoever says Liberalism implies individualism, and whoever says Fascism implies the State.'

From this idea of the national State as an Absolute many things follow. A vulture does not hatch doves. First follows a hardening of the caste system as men and women become imprisoned in their functions. In *The Times* of May 15th of last year I found these views of Herr von Papen, Vice-Chancellor in the German Fascist state: ('The maintenance of eternal life demands the sacrifice of the individual. Mothers must exhaust themselves in order to give life to children.) Fathers must fight on the battlefield in order to secure the future for their sons.')Herr Hitler himself is not always so lucid as when he explains that the individual woman is no more than her function to the State: 'In the education of women emphasis must be laid primarily on physical development. Only afterwards must consideration be given to spiritual values, and lastly to mental development.

This vision of man,-as a creature which feels, thinks, and moves only between the hands of his leaders, leaders who will more readily spring from among violent men than from reasonable ones; a creature which may not reason like a god but only like an obedient servant; nor lift his eyes to any heaven but a national one, nor move without feeling round his ankle the tug of the cord fastening him to his mother the State: this vision must be denied

not only by every democrat but by every artist that knows himself to be the son of God. To match it in Europe we must go as far back as to the mediæval order, in which the bodies of most men belong to their feudal lord and their minds to a consoling and admonishing Church. With the Renaissance this order begins to break up, more quickly in some countries than in others. The mind begins to erode the barriers erected against freedom of thought and enquiry. Again and again it is defeated and flung back, here a scientist retracts, here a preacher is burned, an artist defaces his own work, a poet is silenced by being starved or imprisoned, a writer hides his manuscript, a leader of a peasant revolt is tortured to death. But always it comes on, the advance is never checked along the whole line, where one falls ten take his place.

In the end, but not everywhere in Europe, and not everywhere at once, freedom to think and speak is established as a human right, with behind it a roll of martyrs, men who died defending it, greater than that of any other faith. Writing of Fascism, Mussolini said: 'That this faith is very powerful in the minds of men, is demonstrated by those who have suffered and died for it.' But if it were possible to summon up all those men who died by sundry kinds of death for the freedom he and his have set themselves to murder, they would fill Europe with their voices.

This freedom was never universal. Not only did one country lag behind another—at the opening of the 19th century Germany was still a country of serfs and mediæval gilds—but in every country there were some classes of people who enjoyed less freedom, in their minds and in their manner of life, than others. Listen to this speech by a Mr. Wortley.

'He insisted that, although in the higher ranks of society it was true that to cultivate the affections of children for their family was the source of every virtue, yet that it was not so among the lower orders, and that it was a benefit to the children to take them away from their miserable and depraved parents.'

This speech was uttered eleven years after the beginning of the 19th century, and in defence of the practice of binding London children to the owners of cotton-mills in Lancashire and Yorkshire, there to be worked for sixteen hours a day, with no human being to whom they could look for aid or comfort. The atrocious cruelties inflicted on men, women and children in the early and middle years of the century were able to be done because of the idea some persons entertained of their fellows. They thought that the words 'lower orders' signifies a breed of man, woman, and child which is truly lower in the scale of creation, more akin to the animal, than others. These lower orders are fitted by nature for poverty, coarse and insufficient food,

and a lifetime of toil. This spirit, notwithstanding our softer manners, is not dead. If you could walk across England, questioning all you met, you would find many whose minds are the same age as Chaucer's parson: 'God has ordained that some folk should be more high in state and degree, and some folk more low, and that everyone should be served in his estate and his degree.'

There are many people, some old, some young, but all as rich in goods as they are poor in imagination, to whom it is inconceivable that the poor woman who has borne a child to an unemployed labourer has as overweening a care for it as would, if she could, give it the softest clothes, pure air, food, a fine bed, and clean airy rooms for its estate. This you may see every day in the letters, speeches, and writings of those whom I would call our mediævalists if they were not living in time with the Hitlers, Görings, Papens, and their trooping or preaching mercenaries by whom the most generous concepts of freedom are thought of as the most shameful and ridiculous.

The War did great damage to the invisible increase with us of the idea of freedom. To teach a man contempt, not only for his own life but for the lives of his fellows, is a sure way to give him a contempt for himself. From this springs his longing for a leader, to tell him what to do and think. In place of: 'I am a man, therefore I must grow in

strength and knowledge,' he feels: 'I am a numbered unit, a weak piece of flesh, therefore I must obey. Bring me together with a million of my fellows, so that I feel strong and safe, and tell me what I must do.' We cannot expect that four years in which all our energies are given to war—that is, to the deliberate business of slaughter—would have any good effect. The greatest number of our own people rejoiced in the ferocious terms of the Peace Treaty, which was scarcely possible to be done unless we first emptied our minds of all respect for men as individuals, denying, as though we were good Fascists, that we had an obligation to respect the liberties of any nation but our own. To look back over the history of Europe since November 1918 is to wonder why there is not more violence breaking through the crust than why there is so much.

Moreover it is too easy to blame the War because we are now in danger for our liberties. Too easy and not sensible. The ruin worked by the War gave their footing to men who knew what they wanted and were prepared to use murder and violence to get it. But our freedom, the legacy we have from many ardent men, was always in danger. First because we took it for granted, as though men had never lost their tongues or their lives for thinking their own thoughts. Second because it stopped short at ourselves. A publisher will not refuse to take my books because I am a socialist. But I know

myself many a man and woman who, because it would mean the loss of his livelihood, does not dare to say: 'I shall vote Labour.'

But even that man, you'll say, is freer than his great-grandfather. And that is true—in so far as he possesses a few rights he could use if he had also time and money. I want you to think that something is happening which threatens not the freedom we could have but that partial unsteady freedom we have. It is what we began with—the mechanical advance—by which we have been made as rich in promises as we are poor in fact. Think first that there is now enough knowledge and mastery of Nature and enough machines invented and set up to abolish poverty and the fear of poverty in every corner of the world. Think now that what actually happens is that each new and more efficient machine delivers goods on one side and unemployment on the other, and that this cannot by any means be altered, unless the system be altered whereby a few men, by their personal control of money and of all the natural and mechanical resources of the world, corn, ships, waterfalls, factories, all, all we must use to live, can and indeed must create a world in which the greater part are cheated and many of us are undone by toil and poverty.

So here we have discontent and disorder, and some men crying out to change the system and others afraid of what might come of any great

change and the few resolute to prevent change and the many ignorant, bewildered, anxious. The time is ripe for a leader, but not yet for such a one who will invoke reason and humanity on an unreasonable and inhuman state. A little more and we shall welcome a leader who promises a quick remedy for all ills. Thus he will promise the money changers that they shall keep their money and the poor that they shall be supplied from it, and if any of us ask him how he intends to work both these miracles he will have us silenced.

Let us be very clear about this. If ever this nation submits itself to a dictator the first sacrifice we shall have to make to him is the sacrifice of our freedom to think and speak. There is one condition the dictator of a State must have—that is, sovereignty as much over the minds as over the bodies of its members. No voice must be lifted against him. Enquiry and criticism are infectious. If any of us have a prejudice in favour of reasoning with opponents and against killing or imprisoning them, which is the way oftenest taken by dictators, we must either give up our consciences or our lives.

Giving up our consciences for the State may seem an acceptable sacrifice, as when Mussolini says: ‘The Fascist State organises the nation, but leaves a sufficient margin of liberty to the individual; the latter is deprived of all useless and possibly harmful freedom, but retains what is essential;

the deciding power in this question cannot be the individual, but the State alone.'

Here we have only to ask: 'Sufficient to what manner of life? Harmful to whom?'

I was lately reading the advertisements of new novels and I came on one in which a well-known woman novelist praised another in these terms: 'I suppose I so particularly enjoyed Miss So-and-so's novel because I like to laugh and to forget real life and its problems as often as I can.' I confess I do not understand the temper in which an artist can like to forget his proper study as often as possible. It is as much out of my way of thinking as a heathen religion. To call it irreligious describes exactly its effect on my mind. I have no wish to burn a heretic, since I hold that every man has an inalienable right to the practice of his beliefs, yet I am amazed that any artist should choose this moment to apply for leave of absence. The challenge has been issued to us, in one country already our comrades have been proscribed and their books and paintings destroyed, the order of the day is being written out, it is time to close the ranks.

The issue is one which sharply concerns the artist. It is impossible to put off making our choice to a time when we have less to do, fewer dinners to attend, or less need to finish our own work. There is no question that we are to march; it is still possible to decide whether we shall advance or

retire. Forward to a society in which the individual has more freedom than now, more leisure, more power, and more security: or back to a society organised on the model of the hive or the ant-heap, in which the individual, imprisoned in his function, must read, hear, and write only what is allowed by his masters.

It is to me strange that the artist should say: 'My concern is with my art. What troubles are troubling the world is not my business. Let those whose business they are attend to them, I have my own business.' The poet who continues to write his poems in a leaky ship, though he is needed to pump, seems to himself a sublime being. To me he seems more than a little ridiculous—less, not greater than a man. The storm which is now breaking on the world I take to be more the business of the artist than of other men. In the mind of the artist, man is the great seventh wave of the Creation. When the greater part of men are being starved in the sight of plenty and pressed as the readiest escape from their degradation to enter the service of a State which degrades them further by making itself absolute arbiter of their consciences, the indifferent artist is one that does not care whether he speaks to slaves or free men and whether he himself is a slave or free.

But no artist is indifferent. He who turns away does so as consciously and deliberately as another

who allows his fellows in an emergency to make use of him. I am certain that for one who avoids the fight, a score will take his place. Even in a few months there has been a quickening in us. There are books written and to be written which bring our civilisation before the bar not of any Absolute State but of humanity. This is work for the infantrymen of literature, such as I am. There are others whose minds feel the pressure of changes which would make all our efforts vain. The sculptor John Skeaping has a life-size figure of a naked seated girl. Sir Michael Sadler describes it: 'She is refined in face, but sullen in expression, and primitive in her clubbed feet and massive hands, which clutch a bone resting on her knee. A great work of art, but terrifying. The artist shows us what the great-granddaughter of one of our clever college girls would look like if the existing civilisation of Western Europe had long before been shattered by economic disaster, followed by destructive revolution.'

I cannot see that even the certainty of disaster would absolve us from our duty. If we let the barbarians take charge of our city they will light their fires with all our poems.

This moment can be matched in history. Liberty, equality, and fraternity are the notes of an old song, many times silenced, and forever springing out again.

Now, equality is no need of the artist's. As well as the supreme interpreter between men he is the supreme solitary. He can flourish in any society, however wide the difference of fortune between its classes, in which life is full and rich. There may be savage injustice and cruelty, as there was in Elizabethan England, but if the savour and dignity of life have not yet been squeezed out he can breathe freely. The impoverishment of life that began in the 18th century was at its ugliest when our industrial towns were being built, and children of five years forced into the mills. It is at its most hopeless now, when millions of machine-serfs are eating their hearts in an idleness made sterile by poverty. This is a muddy pool on which the artist must draw. Be in no doubt about it—the artist draws on the life of the whole people, not on that of a class, and if the common life is narrow, stunted, and undignified he cannot escape being wounded by it. He will be driven into abstractions or into frivolity or he will make it his business to protest. If the oppressive order is being attacked he will join the attackers.

One thing is essential to the artist, without which he might as well cut off his tongue and hands. We have nothing if we have not liberty to write and speak by the spirit. The new censorship which spreads in Europe differs from previous ones in being bestially efficient. No earlier tyrant was

equipped with wireless and aeroplanes. He could not appeal to mass psychology for there were no masses, and while he was imprisoning one subversive writer another, a short distance away, was teaching the people a treasonable song. In brief, his tyranny was human, and human wit and courage could mock and even outwit him. Now for the first time it is possible to set a million arms to make the same gesture and a million voices to shout the same words at the same moment.

These instruments we have forged for our undoing. The proscribed writer is proscribed in every corner of his country. The press, the air, the schools, the universities, literature, the drama, even the opera, are founts of propaganda. It goes on day after day, it filters into everything. The appeal is to the mass, and to the lowest emotions of the mass, because these are the easiest to reach. Each catchword is repeated a million times: revenge: tribute: Germany awake: kill the Jew: hereditary enemy. No half tones are possible. An appeal to reason is less than a whisper raised against massed music.

Worst of all, we find that there are artists who do not shrink from betraying one another. In the early weeks of the Nazi regime in Germany I was sent the literary supplement of the *Börsen Zeitung*, which was made up of articles written by hitherto obscure German writers denying and dismissing all those others, a roll beginning with Thomas

Mann, who were not willing to submit their minds. When we remember how eager writers and artists were during the War to help in disseminating lies and hatred, and how few are the names of those who declined to surrender their reason to the emotions of war, we have no right to blame these German writers who have betrayed the Manns, the Zweigs, and the other disgraced Liberals and internationalists. It was never possible in the past for a nation to be put to school to learn the same lesson at the same moment. We cannot judge the effect. But it would be foolish to think that our English freedom is less mortal than others. It is safe only when it is jealously guarded. It is never won. It has always to be fought for.

We have a tradition and an inheritance, of which the artist is the guardian by nature. It is his business to watch that nothing of value is lost or made useless. Our tradition is threatened now equally by war and violence, whether of Left or Right. It could be so scattered and trodden into the ground that a future generation would know as little of Shakespeare as of the quantum theory. These things are only part of our inheritance, which is so rich it can scarcely be surveyed. The habit of self-government: freedom in religion: love of nature: the deliberately taught doctrine that cruelty to children and animals is repugnant: the right to free speech: the habit of freedom in thought and

action, an old and sturdy growth: a distrust of logic—if in any gathering of mixed nationality a voice says, ‘Yes, it sounds perfectly reasonable, but there’s probably something wrong,’ that voice is English: a passionate conservatism joined to a passion for experiment: self-confidence and the habit of self-ridicule: a dislike of instruction and routine.

These virtues and vices are in our bones, but they are not past altering. We find oftenest that between a countrywoman and her urban granddaughter the girl is less shrewd, less inventive and ingenious, less stubborn and less self-sufficient, as well, of course, that she is less superstitious. Even in the English character a subtle ceaseless propaganda would wear new channels. It is scarcely likely that they would be sound. That brutal and narrow self-confidence which permits a man to dictate to his fellows has no understanding of the humility with which truth must be sought. The way of trial and error, of free argument and research, is closed by his orders, and there is no other road. The notion, too, that we become stronger by indulging in collective actions and beliefs is false. Reliance is not learned in a mob. The mind of the mob is closed to reason and accepts what is accessible to it—if it is told to hate pacifists, Jews, and liberal thinkers it will hate them.

Freedom is limited with us but it exists still. We

in this country enjoy a freedom which no dictator would tolerate for longer than it took him to forbid the printing of books or newspapers by his opponents, to take over the wireless, and to replace offending civil servants, schoolmasters, university professors, with others. It will not matter what colour he is of. And while I might wish to be dictated to by one party rather than another, I could never be easy under any tyranny that forbids me to debate what opinions I choose, or orders me to debate what I do not choose. I am honestly anxious that the Russians shall succeed in their experiment but I never thanked heaven I am not a Russian more earnestly than when I was told that Leonov and two other well-known writers had been ordered to report at a factory some journey distant, to write about it. That it was mid-winter and the train they were ordered to take an open one seems to me an infinitely smaller discomfort than the compulsion to praise what, until you have seen it, you neither love nor hate. It is compelling every writer to write advertisements, which is the lowest form of spiritual debauchery.

There is no need especially to pity writers in a dictatorship. If they suffer in having to write what they do not feel it is because they were not more zealous guardians of liberty than other men. If we now believe too easily that the courage and the stubborn faith of the past have secured liberty to

us and to our children forever, we shall have to learn, it may be sooner than we expect, how few days are needed to steal it from us.

The stifling of thought, the suppression of books already written and forbidding of new ones to be written, the forbidding men to speak until they have considered and looked about them whether it is safe, the imprisoning and beating of writers for their beliefs—what a State for artists to live in! Moreover, these things are not done only with a view to quietness—of a graveyard in which lie more liberties than one—at home. They have an eye to war.

The brutish disorder that will follow a war in which whole cities and districts are wiped out, made uninhabitable, festers which break out into typhus and famine, will nourish no artist. Do not comfort yourselves because common men and women, living in Fascist States, shrink from war and talk hopefully of peace. They are our fellow-victims. Nor has Fascism alone created the world conditions in which nations, hell-bent on choking each other with the goods not one of them will distribute at home, piously regard war as a sin to be avoided as often as possible. What Fascism has done is to sharpen the knives. The doctrine of the Absolute State, with its insistence on blind loyalty to the policies and gestures of State authority, its perverting of young minds to praise war, throws

a new element of violence into scales already weighted against men of good will. It does so deliberately, and of its nature. As when Mussolini writes:

'And above all, Fascism, the more it considers and observes the future and the development of humanity quite apart from political considerations of the moment, believes neither in the possibility nor the utility of perpetual peace. It thus repudiates the doctrine of Pacifism—born of a renunciation of the struggle and an act of cowardice in the face of sacrifice. War alone brings up to its highest tension all human energy. . . . Thus a doctrine which is founded upon this harmful postulate of peace is hostile to Fascism.'

Men who will the Absolute and Divine Right and power of their State will, too, the human sacrifices so primitive a god needs. Perhaps never before was the fate of the artist so bound up and marked with the fate of common men. This tyranny respects neither the spirit nor the body, the life neither of the mind nor the blood.

Must not the artist, if he is awake, feel the danger to our inheritance, and wish to defend it? None of us wishes to become pamphleteers and tub-thumpers in a cause. Neither need one of us think it degrading to try what Milton and Swift did. I confess I cannot honour a writer who hears, without feeling himself forced to deny it, a doctrine which forbids the free

and fearless pursuit of Truth in all its forms. The artist is the servant of Truth—by which means, if he decides to abandon his place he can do more damage than another.

For a long time after the War I did not understand what was happening. The issue is now clear. Two principles only are struggling for mastery in the world, and to-morrow belongs to one of them. On one side stands the conception of the Absolute State, holding aloft the banner of its contempt for the liberal spirit of freedom. Against it rises, but weak and scattered, a new affirmation of man's freedom. In sharpest contrast with the dogma of the Absolute State it declares that men should be more not less free. Men are born free and with an equal right to the good and the hard consequences of having been born with the reasoning and feeling capacities of a man. None should bear an unjust share of the common burden. None should be able to think, If I had been born in another rank of society I should have had a better chance. Inequality is a biological fact, but until we have given all children equally a healthy environment we do not know how to distinguish apparent inequalities from real ones.

This affirmation springs from a belief that the custom of allowing an accident of birth to decide for us whom we shall well nourish and well educate is foolish and wasteful. It is denied by the present

grinding and mechanical system, which decides that so far as most men are concerned their right to live depends on their usefulness as supplementary machines. Certain millions of reasoning and feeling creatures it keeps alive, though grudgingly, on the chance that they may some time be needed to tend a machine. As men, as human beings able to read books, to enjoy food, wine, music, art, to contemplate the world, to fulfil mind and body, they have no rights. To acquiesce in this degradation of a great part is to wait in the ante-room of Fascism. A creature who, although he looks like a man, and feels and reasons like a man, and propagates his kind like a man, has no function higher than his function to serve, as cheaply as he can be got, the ambitions of Powerful Interests in times of peace and to defend them with his body in times of war, is fit for nothing but to live in a regimented State.

What is Fascism but the perfection of such a State? Towards it we must move—by a natural law—unless we should turn from it and with all the strength of our human minds and hearts deny it, strive with it, and so force it to surrender to us. There is no choice but between these two—Fascism or Democracy. The choice cannot be put off. Unless we will Democracy we cannot escape Fascism. The present disorder is unendurable, and becoming more unendurable to more people with

every day. This partial and bungling Democracy we have, though I would labour to keep it, cuts a dull figure beside the swagger, the bold promises, the gestures, theatrical as they are, of the new party. The choice is not between Fascism and our present Democracy, a chaos in which food is destroyed and men starve. It is not between a disciplined herd and an undisciplined herd. It is between Fascism and a wider, finer, grander, and more dignified Democracy.

It is not between two slaveries—the regulated slavery of the Absolute State and the unregulated slavery in which millions now live, men only in being able to suffer hunger and despair. (Read the *Memoirs of the Unemployed*.) Men are not yet free. If they were free, Fascism would not exist, since a free man will not sign away his liberty. The choice is between the slavery offered in the name of order and the freedom of which we have seen the promise and the hope. It is between a disciplined herd and a society of well-educated men and women, whose minds and bodies are fitted to stand the rigours of freedom. In this choice the artist is immediately involved, both by being a man, part of the nervous system of his country, and an artist whom freedom has nourished. For him to turn his back, to say: 'I am not concerned, I have other business,' is to separate himself from the sources of his life, to become sterile, a dry stick.

Quicker than other men, the artist should realise that Fascism arises out of man's need for an Absolute. If nothing better is offered to him man will accept a false Absolute, a system which seems to him wide enough to absorb all his impulses and satisfy all his needs, even though to achieve it he has had to sacrifice the greatest of all human values, the freedom of the mind. The known world is visibly changing. There is no security. There is no spiritual authority to which all others owe a final allegiance and which lifts from man the awful burden of disbelief. Nothing compensates him for being poor and unwanted, trapped between the wheels of a machine which grinds out poverty and abundance without being able to control either, and if he is well-off his success, his car, his wireless, do not lessen the awful void towards which he feels himself being hurled and which he must forget in order to live.

This uncertainty, and the consciousness that forces are at work in our world to destroy it, frightens people so gravely that they will cling to anything which offers a foothold. Hence the growth among us of this new vicious Nationalism. It appeals to our proper longing to see England rouse herself from her apathy, her towns cleaned and rebuilt, her countryside a fresh fountain sending life through the whole nation. And at the same time, by its deification of the State, its acceptance of war and exultance in it as the noblest chivalry of

which man is capable, it is preparing a dread fate for the nation in the destructive wars which must arise between States all refusing to abate a jot of their separate sovereignty and all armed with weapons against which courage is useless and endurance vain.

It is useless only to warn men of the disasters which threaten them if they run after this new faith. Nothing is any use but to preach to them a new faith, which offers not less sacrifice but a wider hope. The artist, since he is the most religious man of his generation, is best fitted to do this. He suffers more deeply than other men in a condition of disbelief, and we see how certain living writers have escaped from their feeling of insecurity, one by becoming a Catholic, another by joining the Communist Party, another by becoming royalist, classicist, and Anglo-Catholic. If I tell you that I believe in the brotherhood of all human creatures I am only telling you at the same time that I believe there is no halting-place for humanity in search of an Absolute short of this, and no religion worth dying for except this. I am not telling you that it will inevitably triumph, as Christianity triumphed over a great part of the earth. It is even possible that we are all lost, that unreason will triumph, here as elsewhere. I do not think that is an excuse for feigned indifference or for losing heart. Without ceasing to enjoy the world, to laugh, to read and

to write books, to paint pictures and to admire them, we ought to protest against the acceptance of unreason and violence until our tongues are silenced in our mouths. I have no choice. My conscience will not let me rest when I see and hear men plotting against liberty, and first against that liberty we have still, to argue, to dissent, to utter freely what is in our minds, to hold what faith we will and to teach it.

Now to comfort myself and to refute those who say that the artist should keep his eyes narrowly on his art I will remind you that an earlier threat to our freedom roused one of the greatest of our artists to write plain outright propaganda. ‘Consider what Nation it is wherof ye are . . . a Nation not slow and dull, but of a quick, ingenious, and piercing spirit, acute to invent, subtle and sinewy to discours, not beneath the reach of any point the highest that human capacity can soar to. . . . Behold now this vast City; a City of refuge, the mansion house of liberty, encompassed and surrounded with his protection; the shop of warre hath not there more anvils and hammers waking, to fashion out the plates and instruments of armed Justice in defence of beleaguer’d Truth, then there be pens and heads there, sitting by their studious lamps, musing, searching, revolving new notions and idea’s whereby to present, as with their homage and their fealty the approaching Reformation: others as

fast reading, trying all things, assenting to the force of reason and convincement. What could a man require more from a Nation so pliant and so prone to seek after knowledge. What wants there to such a towardly and pregnant soile, but wise and faithfull labourers, to make a knowing people, a Nation of Prophets, of Sages, and of Worthies. We reck'n more than five months yet to harvest; there need not be five weeks, had we but eyes to lift up, the fields are white already.'

1934.

In the autumn of 1933 Philip Noel Baker asked me what we could do to recruit writers against war and in defence of the policy of 'collective security.' He had the idea to invite a number of writers to dinner and talk to them. A little later this idea took the shape of a dinner given by Viscount Cecil in the Wellington Club, to which I invited the guests. Although I concealed it, I felt nervous about this dinner. I wrote my letters of invitation with a timid cunning, trying to convey to Lord Cecil's guests that they were going to be asked to do something, without frightening them with a prospect of work. And what to ask them to do? To Philip Noel Baker, a man who would open his veins to write, if it were the only way of working for the things he believes, it did not seem out of the way to tell well-known writers they must bring their pens in to help. I knew my fellows too well to share his confidence. And I didn't like to tell him so. We shall eat Lord Cecil's dinner, I thought anxiously, and make polite gestures, and nothing will come of it. I knocked my head, and thought that I would suggest our writing a book together. I did this, after dinner. The dinner itself I had found rather alarming. I was not much at my ease as bear-leader to so many noble writers, but I drew what comfort I could by placing Lord Cecil between Miss Rebecca West and Miss Rose Macaulay. He looked like an eagle sitting between two—now, what vivid bird can I put here without giving offence? Never mind.

I seized my moment, and said that perhaps we could write a book for him. I should have known that the job of editing it would be handed to me. It was. Although my heart sank at the time, I scarcely realised what it would involve—the writing of many more than a hundred letters with my own hand, cajoling, explaining, persuading, encouraging; not to speak of designing the skeleton of the book and struggling with the natural impulses of writers to promise one thing and write another.

I wrote two chapters myself, the first and the last—after vainly trying to persuade various better-found writers to undertake the last one. In the end my own efforts so discouraged me that I thought the finished book would be treated with more respect if it did not appear that I had edited it.

When I wrote the first of these chapters I believed that the only or the best way to prevent wars would be to create an International Air Force by which the League could enforce its authority. This is not the place to explain why I no longer believe this. The supporters of an I.A.F., or many of them, believe that it would be too powerful to be challenged—so that bombs marked ‘League of Nations’ would never be dropped. It is a risk I am not prepared to run. None the less, I believe that the undermining of the proper authority of the League by the government of my country (among others) is a disaster. If I am accused that this is illogical, it cannot be helped here. As the

instrument of the economic reconstruction of a Europe jouflering through its own fault, the League could, if it were called on, do magnificently a job for which it has trained and fitted itself. If it were called on. The reasons why it is not called on are political and moral. Those persons, whether they call themselves realists or pacifists, who rejoice at the assassination of the League, were no doubt present and jeering when Noah got himself aboard the Ark.

The Twilight of Reason

WE have talked and written a great deal about the vileness of war. This has two ill consequences. ‘It has been said before’ is a retort we should be ashamed of, but we make it. And it is not true that all men now hate war. The energy with which we repeat: ‘War is to be hated,’ deceives us with the belief that all must feel what we feel strongly. This is an illusion. The spread of a religion which makes war an acceptable sacrifice is a rude answer to pacifists. It is not only that young men feel or can be made to feel the attraction of war. In the theology of nationalism war has a sacramental value. ‘War alone brings up to its highest tension all human energy and puts the stamp of nobility upon the peoples who have the courage to meet it.’ (Mussolini—*The Political and Social Doctrine of Fascism*.) Merely to say that, except by the unimaginative and the foolishly romantic, war is recognised to be cruel, wasteful, and useless, is nothing—in the end the war of 1914-18 has enriched none of the chief antagonists unless you count as enrichment the manuring of the soil of France and Flanders by the bodies of

our young men. Most of us are unimaginative and foolishly romantic: there are also the interested (as armaments makers) and the spiritually degenerate—perhaps we should write under this last all who, not being of an age or sex to fight wars, encourage others.

To say, which is true: ‘The average decent man in any country does not want war,’ is nothing. The armies of 1914-18 were made up of average decent men. There are not enough of the others to recruit a battalion. The politician who assents to a war does it because he has always been powerless to control the human forces and energies which can start wars. Generals do not enjoy shedding blood, but they are able, perhaps helped by a fortunate want of imagination, to insulate their minds from the practical consequences—which after all can be buried in quicklime—of their orders. The stoical satisfaction with which civilians read: ‘Our losses were only 49 officers and 973 other ranks,’ is hideous only when one thinks, a habit most persons control without much effort. Again, we are too kind to ourselves when we forgot that war is the gratifying opportunity of bullies; of jacks in office; of ill-bred women—I recall the emotions with which I heard one of these cry excitedly to a young man, stopping her car for the purpose, ‘I say, when are you going to enlist?’—and of old men, to enjoy a vicarious youth.

Again, we do well to remind ourselves that it is easy to pay lip-service to peace, in time of peace; to read an account of war written by a doctor, or by a soldier trying to put outside himself an unforgettable or unbearable experience, and cry: 'I had no idea it was like that, but it must never happen again.' If the revolt of the imagination were enough; if anger at the past, if grief for the dead who died uselessly, if fear for the future, such fear as seizes every woman who thinks of war and her son, were enough, there would not be another war. These are not enough, and if we thought they were, we have been foolish.

We must make what haste we can to discover why statesmen—even those who genuinely desire peace—involve their countries in war without, as we say, wishing it. Certainly they *will* it, and to will death (even if it is not our own death) without wishing it, we must be moved by very powerful or very complex motives. If we come to understand these motives we may be in a position to deal with them—given the time. Not understanding them, we may as well fold our useless hands and await the inevitable. It is so with the methods we take to oppose war. To many honest and intelligent people it seems enough, and right, to say: 'We will not fight' (sometimes adding the reservation, 'except in a revolutionary war'). Is this the best way to prevent war? If you assume

that enough men will refuse to fight—or will choose rather to fight against their government—then you are satisfied that it is. The assumption seems to me airy. The passions roused by an immediate prospect of war are more likely to move more men to enlist than to conscientious objection. Nor do I believe that this country, which is as peaceably inclined as any, will soon be in that state in which its citizens would prefer insurrection to war. Education can do a great deal, but it seems unlikely that the sections preaching peace or the sections preaching civil war will be given time to finish their work. The opponents of war must look for other means. We shall delude ourselves if we think that war will be prevented because it is to the interests of sanity and decency to prevent it. These feelings do us a little credit, but they are irrelevant. It is another delusion to think that war can be eliminated without loss of life.

To those of us who remember the mingled relief and agony of the first Armistice Day, it seems strange that we should now be talking of war as if it could happen again, as if that woman who lost a young husband must now fear the loss of his child. (It would seem even stranger, if we had not once already witnessed the calming effects on people's minds of arranging for the slaughter to take place out of their sight.) How has it come about, which a few years ago seemed incredible?

In a sense it is true that the seeds of the next war were sown by the Peace Treaty of 1918. I do not know whether there is anyone, even any newspaper proprietor, still unconvinced that many of its provisions were short-sighted, vindictive, and in a final resort impracticable. Yet since ordinary human beings made it, and not devils or lunatics, they must have been moved by more reputable impulses than those which found a profitable outlet in the gutter Press. They were. They were trying, moved as well by anxiety to do good to their several countries as by fear and ignorance, to force a dangerous rival into a position of inferiority, and keep him there. The state of the world—a congested market-place in which nations struggle for advantage—was not created by the statesmen at Paris. In various ways the war increased the congestion, but it existed and was growing before 1914. It was a determining cause of the War. But to say that war has an economic root does not mean that we must fight for food. The wholesale destruction of wheat, coffee, and cotton crops proves either that we have too much of them or that we are crazy.

In sober fact we are as crazy as a grown man trying to force himself into his first pair of breeches. Our inventive genius has outgrown the social and political organisations in which we live. The astounding mechanical advance is not all; biological

research has already made nonsense of all systems and beliefs based on a fear of food shortage. This enormous increase in productivity has taken place inside a society organised on such lines that it cannot use the food and clothing it actually needs, but must destroy them in order not to be inconvenienced by plenty. Hence the extraordinary spectacle of a world so ill governed that some men are starving and shivering while others are ploughing in wheat and cotton, burning coffee and destroying herds. To complete the picture, note that every pioneer industrial country has in the past assisted, by the export of money and machinery, to industrialise the others. Hence the market in which each can count on selling its 'surplus' goods has shrunk all the while its capacity to produce has been swelling. It is true that a remedy has been suggested. It is perhaps primitive. We are burning the food and scrapping ships and machines. Without regret, one may doubt whether this will cure the disease, since no one, no dictator, has done a great deal, even with the help of steel rods and concentration camps, to eliminate the human 'surplus.' (Many a man rationalised on to scrap heap would feel war as a release.) A world in which only in order to exist, each nation must outsell all the others, is a world perpetually on the step of quarrelling. But it would not be true to picture rival industrialists and financiers, the controllers

of our economic life, encouraging wars in cold-blooded defence of their interests. We must suppose that they would like to eliminate war, if it could be done without a radical change in the structure of society. Within the existing structure, the economic struggle is transformed into war not in a spirit of calculation, but in hot blood. Ultimately it is passion, the passions roused in rulers and ruled alike by what appears as a threat to their existence or ambitions, that makes wars possible and inevitable.

But if the Treaty of Versailles was the very natural expression of the fears and hopes of the victors in an Acquisitive Society, it was none the less a disaster, and to them, too. To the defeated countries it was something more. It worked like an irritant poison, rubbed into the wounds of defeat. Wide-spread misery, uncertainty, and moral and spiritual sickness followed the agony of the Inflation. During this time the prevailing mood in Germany, among ordinary people, was one of bewilderment—almost the bewilderment of a child on whom a crushing punishment has fallen, out of all measure with his crime. Nothing is simple when it is a whole nation which is in question. But to many competent observers during and after this time it seemed that a little generosity extended to a beaten people would strengthen in Germany those voices which could be heard urging that the

way to peace and rehabilitation lay through understanding of other nations. In the event no generosity was shown—which will surprise no one who in his dreams has murdered a man and felt himself driven to strike again and again, in a frenzy of hate, and fear of his own deed.

The triumph in Germany of a very violent form of nationalism was prepared by all of us. It was helped on by the coldness and weakness of the democratic leaders. These allowed even the dead to be summoned from France and East Prussia to march behind Hitler's storm-troops to the overthrow of a régime which had neither the will nor the vitality to defend itself. The collapse of a doctrinaire Socialism would be pitiful if it had not betrayed so many. It is important to understand clearly what has happened in Germany. The whole European situation has been altered by the change-over in this one country from a Liberal democracy to a dictatorship. Those to whom the Nazi movement seems hysteria forget that in hysteria a neurosis is released at the same time that it is exhibited. A people possessed of great vitality has been forced in on itself with every circumstance of humiliation. It would be strange if the repressed forces had issued in any pleasant or amiable manner.

This said, there is no point in forgetting that repugnant methods were chosen by the leaders of the nationalist movement to rouse their followers.

To teach men to think needs time, patience, and a firm respect for the individual man. No leader in a hurry for action begins: ‘Now let us reason together.’ Despising the mob he must use, he appeals to its passions—and since the passions easiest to come by are vanity, and fear with its obverse in hate, it is on fear, hate and vanity that he relies to incite to swift action. Endlessly repeated in simple words, the meanest ideas will in time become part of the mental and spiritual atmosphere of their hearers. ‘Kill the Jew!’ ‘Down with democracy!’ ‘We spit on freedom!’ ‘Revenge!’ No person who has seen an audience of ten thousand persons yelling with hate—of a Liberal statesman, Stresemann—can ever forget it. It is the most repulsive sight in the world.

It would be difficult at any time to believe in the final value, to humanity, of a cause which must advance itself by teaching men hate—hate of the Jew, the Liberal, the pacifist, the internationalist, the foreigner—even had the issue been different, if there had been no beatings and maimings and no concentration camps. To persons of quick physical imagination this straightforward brutality obscures the much subtler injury which a dictator inflicts, only by his need for obedience, on all his subjects. It is this subtler form, and not the under-side of beatings and killings, which is expressed in Hitler’s use of the word *Brutalität*. For the first time in

history, it is possible for a dictator to be everywhere at once. His voice can be heard at the same moment over the length and breadth of his country. Criticism can be stifled and obedience exacted everywhere at once. Under these circumstances, a Germany ruled by a perfervid nationalist is a disturbing factor in European politics. If the economic and financial state of Germany worsens, if (as seems likely) its psychological state is not improved by the latest 'blood bath' (a timely reminder that in Germany all the guns are on one side, and weigh heavier than the anger or misery on the other), then a peaceful solvent of the difficulties confronting its ruler becomes more and more unlikely.

No one supposes that the men and women who are the German nation wish to fight another war. It is just conceivable that a movement reared on hatred can find a satisfactory fulfilment without putting into effect any of the violent threats uttered—at a time when it had not yet triumphed—against the makers of the Versailles Treaty. What is not conceivable is that a social and political doctrine, religious in its fervour, violent and uncompromising, which has established itself by an appeal to the irrational emotions, can reverse the process to encourage its disciples to use their reason. The free exercise of reason by his subjects is one freedom that no dictator can permit. Enquiry and criticism are of their nature impossible

in the conditions of a dictatorship—which, only to exist, must be assured of an unthinking submission to its authority.

The triumph in Germany, with some unpleasant variations, of the Fascist principle of the Absolute State is the triumph of a tyranny which sets rigid limits to the exercise by the individual of his reason. He may reason thus far and no farther. Where the policy and needs of his State are in question he may use his reason to find the quickest means to obey. This attitude to the individual dismisses as irreligious any belief in the creation of a society in which every citizen has been trained in the use of all his faculties.

If it were an isolated phenomenon, we might be satisfied with that view of the Nazi triumph which says: ‘Oh, but the Germans are a servile race: they enjoy being regimented.’ But in fact, Fascism in Italy and National Socialism in Germany are marks of a spread of disrespect for reason which certainly did not begin with them. The philosophy of Bergson, the novels of D. H. Lawrence, the infection of every country by jazz, are all in their different degree symptoms of this disrespect, and furtherers of it. Since the century opened, we have seen pass into popular speech any number of phrases to express an almost religious belief, garbled and distorted from its true origins, in the supremacy and rightness of purely emotional activity. ‘Re-

pression is bad for you.' The reaction was against a form of repression as irrational as any of the forms taken by the revolt against it. Nothing could be less rational than the moral code still in force at the beginning of the century, or the social forms which compel men to starve in the sight of plenty. To transform them demands the ruthless application to them of more, not less, reason. But the intellect gives off no heat. The emotional assault burned up first, and its devouring energy caught here and there, destroying and confusing—to the careless onlooker it seemed right to talk of the 'decay of authority,' the 'collapse of standards,' as if nothing but destruction and disintegration were taking place.

The disintegration is in fact almost complete. In every European country except Soviet Russia, society still has a feudal basis, in the sense only that the amount of care given to a child from birth is determined by the class into which it happens to be born—and if born into poverty it will later have to prove its right to be well educated by showing exceptional merit and persistence. But the purposive spirit of the feudal society has vanished. Society has become a rabble of individuals, some rich, some poor, some anxious to serve the community, others anxious for their own interests. The deference a poor man pays to his superiors is paid to a more powerful individual, not to authority

as such. Yet in fact the authority of rich over poor is more crushing than it ever was, since so many men have become merely cogs in a particular machine, and when the machine stops they are of no further value and can be left to rust.

Politically, all men are equal. In all other ways, inequality is the established religion. An irrational confusion exists at the very centre of society. If, as in Germany, poverty and humiliation are widespread, men who are conscious of their misery look round them for support. Perhaps they find it in an idea. But an idea sings no songs and carries no banners. To most, the thought of a leader is more consoling—a leader who gives them banners, who does not ask them to think or to understand what is happening in the world, but warms them with his appeal to their emotions and animal instincts. Thus the difficult step towards a more rational form of society is avoided—at the cost of plunging farther into unreason. The leaderless mob does not, since in the conditions of a disorderly and irrational society it cannot, evolve into a community of self-respecting and free-thinking citizens. It takes a step backward, to the mediæval creed of blind obedience to an overlord, to the Nazi students at Berlin University shouting together: ‘We spit on freedom!’ (*Wir scheissen auf die Freiheit!*) Finally it accepts the curious command to think ‘with its blood.’

The denial of reason is complete, in the order of the day given to the German 'clerk' by Hitler himself—'not to seek out objective truth so far as it may be favourable to others, but unceasingly to serve one's own truth.' With this, the intellectual structure of civilisation collapses. Truth, intellectual integrity, with the spirit of free enquiry, drown together in what D. H. Lawrence calls 'the grand sea of the living blood.' Can one believe that their bodies are as easily disposed of as the bodies of broken Liberals, Marxists, internationalists, and the rest?

If it were not for the living nerves that bind nation to nation, we could watch the triumph of an irrational principle in the triumph of Fascism and National Socialism with some such emotion as Mr. Wickham Steed felt when he wrote to *The Times* asking the sympathy of the civilised world for Carl von Ossietsky, a distinguished Liberal, dying in the concentration camp at Sonnenburg. But we have already caught the disease—naturally, since what we are witnessing is not a German or an Italian phenomenon, but the manifestation in those countries of a universal revolt from reason. This is not all. The revolt has been fed by the very rise into consciousness of that complex of needs, impulses and energies which fastens one modern nation to all the others. Our inter-dependence is neither wholly economic nor wholly

spiritual. In part it is artificial and evil, as in the forced relation between debtor and creditor nations. But it exists, and we live under the awful burden of knowing that every advance towards unity—as when an airman circles the world in eight days—is an equal advance to possible disaster, since aeroplanes can be equipped with gas bombs.

There thus arises at the same time a horror of the new relation between countries and an idea of using it. Let us, so runs the *idea*, bring into the open this web of inter-national nerves and protect it by agreement between ourselves, lest by strife we destroy the living nerve and so perish. To the reason, this step from national to international organisation seems inevitable—the wholly right and natural conclusion of a long progress. But it is natural only if we assume a common impulse, operating in every nation, to devise the new social forms demanded by the advance in technical and biological inventiveness. It is not in the least inevitable.

On the contrary—suppose that the world remains divided into a number of industrial nations each striving with each for a market which shrinks as industrialisation increases, then another and disagreeable conclusion is ‘inevitable.’ Apart from the certainty of war, it is worth remembering that the latest and most trustworthy investigations into population growth discover a startling decline in

fertility in the industrialised nations—as if, despairing of any other solution of the paradox of wasted food and wasted individual lives, nature was preparing to solve it by the death of the species.

If it amuses you to talk of the inevitable, in a world in which nothing, not even the cycle of birth and death, is unchanging and unchangeable, here it is again. It was ‘inevitable’ that the effort of reason to grasp the significance of what is happening, and the stirrings of the impulse to cope with it on rational lines, should rouse a violent instinctive revolt. The brute in man—the rage of the tiger, the vanity of the peacock, the timidity of the herd, and the acquisitive greed which is almost peculiar to the human animal—feels and resents in advance the approach of another measure of civilisation. In a rationally planned world, Göring’s occupation’s gone—anyhow, his present occupation. The simple division of mankind into herd and herd-leader is spoiled by a conception of civilisation which requires the development of every human being to the full stretch of his capacity.

Over a wide area of Europe the irrational revolt has proved stronger than the promptings of reason. And since there is no fundamental division in man between instinct and reason—one cannot be insulated from the other—the revolt against reason has been able to make use of the energy of reason to help it. Nationalism has its good as well as

its evil side. It is well that every nation should establish a balance between its industry and its agriculture, that it should maintain a spiritual continuity with its past. It is not well that it should use its resources to support itself in the role of robber baron in a world eight days wide. To advance all these purposes, good and bad, nationalism has been able to call upon reason to serve it. National Socialism established itself in Germany by using reason to exploit the irrational emotions of discontent, fear, and pride. Do not let us imagine, because we see great mathematicians, scholars, and writers exiled from Germany, that there is no intellect serving the new régime. Let us turn rather from this spectacle to another—the complete and humiliating defeat of men (the German democratic leaders) who did not know how to give emotional validity to an idea, since neither they nor the idea were alive.

Contempt for the idea of an international organisation involves the belief that the national State is the highest and most complex social organism possible. ‘Beyond the State—nothing’ (Mussolini). Organised into separate sovereign States, the world has achieved an ultimate degree of organisation, within the realities of human nature as these are comprehensible to ‘realist’ thinkers (though not, necessarily, to biologists). It follows on this belief that the conception of a wider organisation, based

finally on the relationship of the individual man to the planet on which he lives, is an absurd delusion. 'Hostile to the spirit of Fascism, though accepted for what use they can be in dealing with particular political situations, are all the international leagues and societies which, as history will show, can be scattered to the winds when once strong national feeling is aroused by any motive—sentimental, ideal, or practical. . . . Fascism repudiates any universal embrace, and in order to live worthily in the community of civilised peoples watches its contemporaries with vigilant eyes, takes good note of their state of mind and, in the changing trend of their interests, does not allow itself to be deceived by temporary and fallacious appearances.' (Mussolini, *The Political and Social Doctrine of Fascism*.)

Again it was a thinker who provided the intellectual scaffolding for the spirit which denies reason. A nationalist theology, charged with emotion, was distilled from the *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts* during the century which separates its publication from the march on Rome. For Hegel, the national State was the final social and political reality, in which is subsumed every activity of its members. So it is for the Italian dictator—'Fascism conceives of the State as an absolute, in comparison with which all individuals or groups are relative, only to be conceived of in

their relation to the State.' It is true that the Hegelian thesis was applied to Fascism only after it had marched. A joyous moment, brightening the long twilight of the underworld, will be that in which the ghost of Hegel is greeted for the first time with a vehement *Heil Hitler!* and shown the shirts, rods, and whips of his latest disciples.

In this view of the State as an absolute, the individual resigns his private conscience and reason into State keeping—actually he resigns it into the keeping of the dictator in whom the will of the State resides and by whom it is determined. No one has seen a State, though it has armies, prisons, schools, and frontiers. In democratic theory, these exist to enforce the will of the individuals composing society, to ensure their peaceful continuance in the way of life they themselves have chosen. In fact, in such partial democracies as exist, they enforce an economic rule which turns the greater number of their free citizens into the cogs of a machine, useless when it ceases work, to be kept then alive by the distribution of a dole. Yet a noticeable measure of freedom can be accommodated within the framework of these pseudo-democracies—noticed most when it has been lost, as now in Germany where literature, the Press, the schools, the air itself, are one mouth, and men look over their shoulders before criticising their government.

This is a difference in kind. Both States, the

authoritarian as much as the democratic, are subject to the irrational social tradition which starves men while it destroys food. But in the one the nervous system by which the body of the people transmits its often conflicting impulses to its head remains alive, and in the other it has been destroyed. ‘The Fascist State organises the nation, but leaves a sufficient margin of liberty to the individual; the latter is deprived of all useless and possibly harmful freedom, but retains what is essential; the deciding power in this question cannot be the individual, but the State alone.’ (Mussolini.)

But when the Fascist writes of the Absolute National State that it ‘has itself a will and a personality,’ he is writing of the will and the personality of one individual, the Leader, the State-in-person. His will is arbitrary, a usurper of all other wills; where submission is not made willingly, forcing it by brutal and indecent means. In a final analysis the Absolute National State is more anarchic than any other—just as, by its denial of the possibility of a further advance in civilisation, it is more irrational than any other.

To that persistent faith which holds that not alone the well-being of the individual, but the very continuance of the species, depends on our finding means to socialise man’s inventiveness, there is something even more alarming than repugnant in a creed which reduces society to the type of the

ant-heap and the hive. A man who is content not to think unless his thoughts agree with a dictator's; not to lift voice or finger against the dictator's uncontrolled policy, at home and abroad; not to entertain any notion of his own humanity that is intelligible at the other side of a customs office, has contracted himself into an abject service—no less abject for his covering up his self-degradation with talk about 'blood awareness' and 'mystic sense of unity.' An automatic and unthinking obedience is worth nothing to the individual, and finally less to his State than the reasoned reflection of free men. In the Fascist view the individual is no more than the function he can perform for the State. If he could teach them to propagate themselves, a robot worker-caste and a robot army would be more useful to the State Leader than one of flesh and spirit.

Much more useful. It is a militant unreason which has triumphed in the doctrine of the Absolute State. We have no excuse for deceiving ourselves on this point. Into a world made sufficiently unstable by economic rivalries, Fascism has brought a newly dangerous element of violence. War, which modern ingenuity has made the collective suicide of nations, the last triumph of the irrational, is accepted by Fascists as the highest activity of the human spirit. 'Above all, Fascism, the more it considers and observes the future and the develop-

ment of humanity quite apart from political considerations of the moment, believes neither in the possibility nor the utility of perpetual peace. It thus repudiates the doctrine of pacifism—born of a renunciation of the struggle and an act of cowardice in the face of sacrifice. War alone brings up to its highest tension all human energy and puts the stamp of nobility upon the peoples who have the courage to face it.'

Is this last true? The answer was given between 1914-18. 'War alone' selects the best for death; exhausts and so poisons the spirit of a people that they are unfit to make peace; perfects machinery for the mass slaughter of human beings. Modern war is indefensibly destructive and wasteful, not only of lives but of the moral and spiritual fabric of civilisation. It no longer pits human courage and endurance against the fear of death, but against the inhumanity of a machine which kills by numbers.

In 'the blood-stained struggle,' says Mussolini, the fundamental virtues of man are revealed to the full light of the sun.'

It is a lie. In the end they are revealed only to what is no fuller of light than the earth, the worms, the quicklime.

Reason looks at a world so small that a man can fly round it in eight days, so rich that it could feed twice its existing peoples, so disorderly that it half starves millions of them, so civilised that a

squadron of aeroplanes can annihilate in agony a city, and warns it: Agree or perish. In the meantime unreason erects Absolute States, all refusing to abate a shoulder-strap of their separate sovereignty, equips itself with poison gases, exhorts young men to praise war, and women to submit to the hideous death of their sons 'in defence of the future.' Is there no escape?

If there is, reason must find it. It may fail, as it has failed in the past, to avert disaster. But there is no easier hope, and no way of averting the unmitigated disaster of another war but to rouse against it the will and intelligence of those in whom reason is alive. Upon my word, we should be fools not to try, and stocks if we could try without passion.

Praise be, we have this in our favour—that we have no need to rouse a will to peace. With ordinary people—that is, the people who must fight—the will is strongly there. We have to make the paths straight for it. When we preach, we have to preach the means by which peace can be made sure. We have to say, until our tongues dry up, that a world eight days wide, in which no over-riding authority exists to give judgements as between State and State, is precisely in the case of a community with no authority to uphold its common law. The word 'anarchy' applies to both. It would be better if we said to persons

unwilling to accept this plain fact: ‘So you are an anarchist?’ rather than: ‘So you are prepared to have wars?’ Since most persons can answer truthfully that they certainly are not prepared to have a war, it is well that they should be faced at once and sharply with the contradiction they fall into by hating and denying war without in the same breath denying the right of a country—of every country, of their own country, of England, Germany, France—to be both judge and defendant in its own cause.

This must be faced. It is hard for an Englishman to learn to say: ‘It is right and necessary that England should submit herself to a supreme international authority.’ Certainly, ‘My country, right or wrong’ sounds better, sending a drum-beat through the veins. ‘My country, dead or alive,’ does not sound so fine, and many pacifists think it enough to try to make people understand that to accept another modern war for their country is accepting its death. Simply. But it is not enough. We have to say to our minds and hearts, to English minds and hearts: ‘If you persist in saying: England is and shall be absolutely free, we will keep her free and make her so strong that no enemy will dare attack us, then you hope, perhaps, that the other countries will nod their heads and say: Yes, yes, be stronger than any of us, be the strongest of all. But what happens if these do

not? What happens if each in his turn says: We are and will be absolutely free, we will keep ourselves free and make ourselves so strong that no enemy will dare attack us? You know well what will happen. Talk of security—in a world in which each one of six nations is persuaded that it must be stronger than all the others? Anything may come of this lawless situation, except security. Security alone is definitely ruled out.'

We have to say: 'Do you think it right that England should be the absolute sovereign judge in any dispute between herself and other nations?' To those who answer Yes, we have to say: 'Then you deny to all other countries a right you claim for your own country, and a security you claim for your own country. But they will not accept your denial. Thus every dispute will be a wrangle between armed judges. But this is anarchy—world-wide and murderous. Is this what you choose?'

Between nations, as between citizens, there must be occasions of offence. If wilful, then one nation or its government is in the wrong. It is more likely that conflicts will arise in which each side is honestly assured that it has a grudge against the other. There is a conflict of two rights, each, in the minds of its supporters, 'essential,' 'elementary,' and the rest. Now if there is none to decide between them, the cause will be tried in war. The war will decide. It will decide which nation has

the larger guns, the deadlier poisons, the less helpless generals, the better position, or only the better luck. A moment will come, enough flesh having died and rotted and enough spirit failed, when it will be said, The decision is reached. We have to say: 'Do you believe that a decision reached in this way is sound? the best that could have been made? worth the cost? likely to be final (except for those who were living and are now dead)?'

Let us not say: 'Will you choose war or peace?' Let us say: 'Will you choose the sovereign independence of your country, armed to enforce its rights, or will you choose peace?' Let us say: 'Our enemies are not the men and women of another country. They are ourselves.' They are elderly professors to whom war is a theme; they are newspaper proprietors who have so few wits or so withered a conscience that they persist in bawling that we should abandon the hope of advancing beyond international anarchy and save ourselves by building more aeroplanes than all the other nations who are building more aeroplanes than all the other nations; they are the interested persons who make instruments of war and sell them, with a happy impartiality, to every country which can pay for them; they are the 'realists' who accept a disorder which exists; they are the romantically-minded who imagine that war is still, after the invention of poison gas and the rest,

what they call ‘practical’; they are writers in whom it induces a flow of pseudo-mysticism; they are women who commit the indecency of assenting to wars which others will fight; they are all of us in those moments when, losing faith, we think of a war as something other than it is—the blasphemous betrayal of the future of man.

1934.

This was written exactly four years ago. It is now September 27, 1938. We are waiting to know whether the war which has been hanging over us for some time will begin in the next few days. I believe firmly that it could have been averted altogether if we had not had, as rulers, men whose minds were too set to move freely in the post-war world. These men dread war fully as much as anyone who is neither saint nor fanatic, that is, as much as any of us, common men and women, and during these last days they have worked to prevent it cutting us down. It may be too late. If it is not too late, if we are given another chance, it is more than we deserve. We are all, except the young, guilty. We could all have done more.

A car with a loud-speaker has just stopped in this quiet street. I open the window to listen. It is broadcasting instructions about the fitting of gas-masks.

In the End

THE impossibility of any task is no reason for not trying it. One could as well decide to give up living since no one has ever succeeded for more than a few years. It is so with this business of opposing war. One needs toughness of mind and spirit first and throughout. It is difficult for a mother to believe that merely human decency is not enough to hinder another war; or for a survivor of the last war to realise that an experience cannot be conveyed to others with enough sharpness to kill the nerve of war; or for the imaginative to understand that to most their revulsion offers only a curious spectacle, such as George Fox offered to the good people of Lichfield with his running out crying, ‘Woe, woe, to this bloody town!’ But before we can work against war, we must once face our weakness, and the chance of defeat, then never look at them again. In sober truth, they are not important to us. What is more important is to remember the merely *practical* urgency of preventing another war. A living disorder is better than an ordered graveyard, to feel hunger and cold is less barren than dying in the death of society. It is

precisely because I hope for social change that I fear war. Only the wilfully romantic imagine that war will open the door to a more healthful civilisation. It will shut that door for generations after ours.

No doubt we insist too often on the economic origins of war. They vex us, because we feel that we have been duped meanly; blood and oil, we feel, should not have been mixed—as they were, and will be. The circle of instability, tension, war, has been narrowed by our own ingenuity. We used to speak of the pressure of population on the world's food supplies: it is the other way round now—the food supplies are pressing on the people, with painful and potentially disastrous results. But the anxieties of rival groups of capitalists to keep their markets are not the whole story. These squalid personages do not fight their own wars. They do not even, it seems, give any time to calculating whether a war is the cheapest and safest way to acquire control of a market. There must be some other cause why we kill each other instead of bargaining.

In fact, there are too many. The passions of nationalism are twisted with our nerves. They infect and draw strength from our imagination. To rid ourselves of them through education needs time, at least a generation or two, and intelligence. But it seems that we have not enough mind to rid

ourselves of slums—or else we need an astronomical age to do it in—which is surely an easier task than eliminating war. To say all—one effort involves the other. Poverty and war grow in the same soil and have the same smell.

The lives of all but a few of us are unnaturally circumscribed by our living in a society we have outgrown. Poverty is not caused by scarcity. We are now so inventive that, if it were only distributed to us with intelligence, we could all, every grown man and child of us, enjoy leisure, the varied exercise of our bodies, and the life-long training of our minds. Alas, that our desires and our hopes, the hunger for life and more life which is born with us, are forced down in us not by a natural necessity but by an unnatural social disorder. And so it comes about that for many men war is a sudden unlooked-for release. In 1914 many a man saw a door opened for him—to escape from monotony, from a drab or a too safe or a familiar life. Aldous Huxley speaks of the satisfaction, ‘as pleasurable exciting as a prolonged orgasm,’ of hatred, and of our ‘urgent psychological need for the orgies of militant nationalism.’ Add here the sharp joy many men experience in being called on to serve an idea instead of a machine (if the idea is a lie, that makes no difference). Even to a man who experienced it with reluctance, war can seem more decent than to be living in the purlieus of a mechanical civilisation

with its trail of half-fed children and men economised' into misery. In a society in which many millions of men are perpetually starved of the colour and rich variety of life, their energies cheated, war is an outlet for other energies than the energy of hate.

We have two socially irresponsible classes—an upper and a lower, a rich, spending class and a poor, machine-serving class, both relieved from the *necessity* of taking any interest in the direction of society. Either may choose to play a part, or to try to play a part. Their mere existence side by side is a source of bad taste and bad blood. The excremental houses, furniture, books, films, deposited in such vast quantities in every country, should warn us that we are being poisoned—neither our minds nor our senses are trained to reject this machine-made ugliness. Our rulers have no time and no will to train us, just as and for the same reasons that they have neither time nor will to rid us of poverty and war. The Acquisitive Society perpetuates the existence of irresponsible classes. War is the final solution of their mindless and irresponsible activities, and their wasted or unsatisfied passions.

Any change in society, *for the better*, must be towards creating fewer irresponsible and insensitive men and women, able to endure ugliness because their senses do not reject it. But this involves us

in the necessity of dissociating the right to be well-educated from purely irrelevant circumstances. We should have to educate each child according to its real abilities, and in deciding whether it should be trained with a view to manual or intellectual labours we could not take into account the accident of its father being a company director or a coal-heaver. We waste a great deal of good human material by confusing real biological inequalities with artificially-created ones. To make certain that no real ability was being wasted or deformed we should have to bring up every child in the same natural environment—that is, in respect of their food, clothing, fine airy rooms, exercise and the rest. But this is to make such reckless use of our acquired knowledge and skill that the coal-heaver's child, only by being born, falls heir to the sum of civilisation. There is no natural reason why it should not, since it has not yet had time to prove that it is too lazy, or too stupid, or too ill-natured, to be turned into a valuable citizen. Our present reasons for behaving towards it, at sight, as if it deserved no better than a poor and scanty nurture, are all forced on us by the simple fact (which has a complex cause) that our system of production has out-run its capacity for distribution. It would seem that if, with wise husbandry of our human resources, we wish to breed fully-responsible citizens, we shall be forced to cut our stick for a

fully-educated and classless society—despite the losses it would inflict on the makers of cheap nasty furniture, films, books, houses.

There is a vital relationship of war, poverty, and Fascism. If we will war, we will poverty with the same impulse. If we cannot get rid of poverty, with its dead weight of the irresponsible and the repressed, we cannot eliminate war. Fascism exploits and perpetuates both. Poverty, and the fear of poverty, so deform men that an ambitious and unscrupulous man, a dictator, can do as he pleases with them. And war, the threat of war, and preparations for it, are as excellent a rod as he needs to keep order in the ranks of a regimented nation.

Moreover, what does a man gain who exchanges the life of a machine-serf for that of a soldier? One offers a quick death; the other squeezes the life out of him slowly over years. To our present condition, the machine has a higher value than that of the man who serves it. If it were not so, should we leave young men to rot in body and mind because no machines need their attention? We deny to these many men and women the human right to enjoy their minds and bodies in a proper rhythm of work and play. Good food, wine, music, books, leisure, are not for them. In short, we behave to them in times of peace as if they were only fit to mind a machine (or to be kept half-alive in case they should be needed to mind one). We

prepare them for Fascism—what freedom have they to lose?—and to shout for war at the bidding of any of their rulers, who have never taught them to use their minds or given them anything to lose except their rags.

More than half a million English died in the last war. Not all of these were without a vision of their country—for which and not for some abstract notion of duty they died. If you could ask one of them why he fought, he would perhaps answer, ‘Because I was conscripted’; but another, turning, would say, ‘I fought for a field and the corner of a lane’; and another, ‘It was for a house like, but not exactly like, a million others.’ The England of their vision was a kindly country. It did not appear to them in the form of a derelict shipbuilding town where iron and men rust together. ‘They died for England’—but it was for an England which, stubborn in faith, they believed would come from their efforts. Under the soil of those other countries, their mouths gape open on a question, one only, the same day after day, from that moment when they were still part of our lives to this, ‘For what did we die?’

There is no answer. Is it an answer to say, ‘We have done something for our unemployed and their children, doling out life with a close hand’? Is it an answer if we talk of keeping order by taking away men’s liberty? The refusal to disarm, the

new preparations to re-arm, answer them with a hideous mockery. ‘Yes, yes, you died for a new and more deadly gun, a new gas.’ If there should be another war, and any who are reading this survive, they will at least know the answer to that persistent question, ‘For what did we die here?’ For nothing.

You cannot prevent war by appealing to men’s interests. At some moment their aimless passions will defeat you. You must set other work for their passions, before it is too late. To call them up for peace needs only the liberating force of an ideal, breaking into their minds. The avoidance of war is not an end in itself. It is a means, a condition without which we cannot find any answer fit to make to our half-million of dead.

For our virtues, we still have time given us to choose between plain issues. Do we choose to be governed despotically, or to govern ourselves in a condition of greater freedom and greater individual responsibility—dictatorship, or a society of self-respecting (because respected) men and women? to prize, as now, machines above men, or men more than machines? to lapse into war and anarchy, or knowingly to accept the necessity of taking the first steps towards a European union? There is no way in which we can maintain ourselves where we are, in an irresponsible and half-educated democracy; at peace and not at peace. Either

people must be educated to stand the rigours of freedom, or they should not be teased with glimpses of it. Either this country must be willing to plan boldly for peace, or we shall find ourselves planning, with our usual mingling of niceness and prudence, for another war. We have a tradition of freedom. We can lose it by resigning it in a moment of panic to a leader who promises to save us from our own weakness. Equally we can lose it by too narrow an interpretation—as if nothing had happened in the last quarter-century that should alter our conception of free national States.

Where the *rulers* have no vision, the people perish. For a nation of shopkeepers we are singularly less anxious to make a profit than to tell or to hear some new thing. The Puritan delight in success for its own sake is not truly at home with us. Anyone who lives in a small town, small enough to be itself and not the copy of a city, knows the alacrity with which the shutters are put up for a day off—on any excuse or none. So now if we are out of heart it is because we have neither bread nor dreams. This is a people which rouses itself only when it is asked to do something too hard for it. Our leaders—politicians, newspaper peers and the like—serve even their own interests badly by advocating all the time measures of self-interest and safety. They could have the people awake and eager, roused from apathy, by a policy of bold adventure.

In the past there have been little Englanders (one has a pen in her fingers writing the words), in love with an England which never was but could be, and, as if opposing them, internationalists of a country no smaller than Europe. It is time for the two dreams to grow together. The jealous lover of England can no longer separate her in his dreams from the other countries of Europe. Only to live, and to grow to her full strength, she must make advances to become one of a larger family. It is true the other members of this family—or their heads, since the common people are everywhere for peace—are as suspicious of each other, ready to take offence and to accuse each other of bad faith, as if they lived on separate planets. But sanity has not yet left them. There is still time to be adventurers for an idea. Do not our rulers know that we are hungrier for a faith than for bread? The dry husks of their policies do not feed us. We know, without their mumbling it over and over, that the situation abroad is menacing and uncertain, and know, too, where to lay part of the blame. We have waited, and are still waiting, for a sign that they have as much passion for peace as we common men have, and as much faith as would move them towards deserving it. If there was one English statesman could see farther than his nose (and his place) to draw us the design of a settled Europe, with England its heart, we should believe and live.

Ours is the largest and most important political unit in the world. Our people occupy territory in every continent; our interests—more penetrating—cross the frontiers of every foreign State. More than any other State, more even than those which exceed us in actual or potential wealth, we can influence world thought. This power we have is recognised by other countries. The gestures we make, they will copy. The course we take, they will follow; the policy we commend, if we ensue it, they will prefer. Of the politicians who throng that Hall of Hopes, the Assembly at Geneva, it is the British on whom all wait. It is therefore our duty, and it should be our pleasure, to assume the responsibility, and show the bogged and strayed nations of Europe a road to follow. In the past our political servants (our elected representatives are our servants: we have not yet made the *arriviste* our master) have dodged, shied, put down their heads, stuck in their feet, rolled over, rather than commit the country to a positive policy. In defence of their negation, they have tried to shift the burden of their servile reluctance to act on to the unwillingness of the politicians of other countries—‘Poor-spirited men use arts of protraction, and make their position contemptible.’

It is the privilege, the right and the duty of great Britain and the Dominions, the most powerful, as it is the most democratic, group of great Powers

within the League, to ensure the peace of the world. We have held back from our responsibility too long.

'Now the great curse of European politics at the present day was that though the peace *lovers* were in a large majority, the peace *makers* were in a minority. England was the chief offender. What was the use of her platonic efforts for peace if she could never summon up courage to give some solid proof of her love? By her voluntary withdrawal from the chessboard, she had deprived the party of international order of its best piece.' These words were written by one of the acutest of English diplomatists, Sir Robert Morier, sixty years ago. If, as Mr. Baldwin suggests, our frontier is now the Rhine, Morier's words are to-day doubly true. Our duty is to lead, not to withdraw.

Indeed we cannot withdraw. Our frontier is not the Rhine. In actual fact, we have no frontier, or our frontiers are the edges of the world.

On November 10th, 1932, Mr. Baldwin appealed to the conscience of the young men, in whose hands, he said, it lay to decide 'this bloody issue of war. . . . If,' said he, 'the conscience of the young men should ever come to feel with regard to this one instrument [the air arm] that it is evil and should go, the thing will be done; but if they do not feel like that—well, as I say, the future is in their hands. But when the next war comes, and European civilisation is wiped out, as it will be and by no

force more than by that force, then do not let them lay the blame upon the old men. Let them remember that they, they principally, or they alone, are responsible for the terrors that have fallen upon the earth.'

So Pilate '*took water, and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, I am innocent of the blood. . .*'

We who write here think it more pertinent to appeal to the conscience of the older men—whose hands are still clutching as firmly as ever the power to order the lives of these same young men. It is in their hands, and not in any younger hands, to take the decisions that will bring to us war or peace. They will not be innocent of the blood if our sons are enlisted, not to defend but to destroy civilisation, in another and more hideous war.

For belief, and for the courage which having a belief gives, there needs no certainty of a victory. It *may* be too late. Unreason and violence may triumph. To a politician, whose notions of victory rarely go beyond securing his place, that may seem of great importance. To most of us, and especially to young men and women, it is of none. In my part of England, when anyone says, 'You mustn't do it, it's impossible,' we have a way of answering with a kind of shrewd bold conceit, 'Why, it can be *tried!*'

'You mustn't dream of it, a united Europe is impossible.'

'Why, it can be tried!'

In Germany, the supporters of a Liberal democracy were defeated and punished because they had no passion. Many men have died for an idea, but they drew it again for themselves in working dress—as no soldier ever died for 'England' or for 'France,' but for something much simpler and lighter to carry. To rouse us from our sleep-walking state, with all its dangers, wants some reality at hand. We who are only 'clerks' and ordinary men have less authority than others, than the men who misrepresent us at conferences and the like. But it seems we have the better heads. To us at least it has become clear that there is no safety in sitting close at home, not even if we should have as many aeroplanes as there are gulls about our shores.

Many voices must drown ours before the strife is ended between those who would be willing to pay for lasting peace and those who are preparing a war which, it is likely, they will not have to fight. It is something that we have on our side half a million whose names can be read on memorials in the cities, towns, and small villages of our country.

1934.

*Some rash editor must have allowed me to write
this marginal note, but alas I cannot remember
who did.*

Genius

WE have become so ashamed of uttering the word 'genius' that well-known reviewers are constrained to apologise for bestowing it on no more than two new writers a month. Their nervousness is a just punishment on them for reading so much fiction, a habit which would weaken the moral fibre of a saint, and there is no need to suppose that our critics are all Saint Sebastians. Neither need we fly to the other verge and conclude that ours is an age without a recognisable literary genius. I shall give myself the pleasure of commenting on two—it is true they are dead—in the belief that it is only in the living example that we can understand the nature of the mortal illness to which we have given the name 'genius'. It is a sickness because it behaves much as do those invading physical cells which disturb the balance of a man's body and kill him in the end unless they are arrested or cut clean out. The writer, painter, composer, of genius feeds either on others or on himself; if the latter he is singularly apt to die young.

It is the nature of genius to see and to know more both of the present and the future than we

others see. In this way it becomes the interpreter, the ambassador, of the future to the present. Talented persons can discover the seeds of tomorrow living in the earth, but for none of these is the future a living reality, as it is in the consciousness of genius. In the novels of D. H. Lawrence the present is a mirror which has the power to reflect the future. No more vivid accounts of the present day exist than those in which he describes the lives of miners, unconscious creators of our world; a so-called 'advanced' society; a war-time music hall; a bull fight; the look of our industrial civilisation seen from below. His books are alive with jostling shapes—trees, mountains, animals, fields, foreign cities, continents. Under the seeming solidity of this creation we become aware of tremendous cracks, fissures into which it may disappear. This miner's son was born at the moment when we have to choose between mastering or being enslaved by the energies released when the first miner drove his spade into the ground. He knew that we in England have broken nakedly with a past of secure narrow communities and he feared what may become of us, rootless, in a world without any values but those of the money-lender. His knowledge of the future was entirely instinctive. He did not know, when he exalted the 'warm living blood' above the intellect and threw up his cap for the 'dark gods' who are waiting to take

possession, that a faith will arise which orders men to 'think with their blood' and kill their intellectual enemies. His instinct warned him only of the nearness of this return to barbarism, and because he believed that it was better than sterility and dryness he welcomed it.

Compare him with a writer of far greater intellect, the German novelist, Broch, author of *The Sleep-walkers*. This long work displays qualities lacking in D. H. Lawrence's novels, scholarship, balance, a vast social knowledge. With infinite patience and courage the German writer shows off the contemporary scene against a background of the long travail of civilisation until this moment of awful uncertainty and awful loneliness. It is the loneliness and the uncertainty through which a woman passes to give birth, and Broch has faith that the new birth is the brotherhood of man.

It is possible.

Certainly, no one can read this book without being altered by the experience. And yet in the end one hesitates to use the word 'genius' of him, because the sap of the future does not rise in his work, as it rises in Lawrence's. We receive him only in our minds, but our senses do not think with him; we reason with him about the future, but it neither freezes nor warms us as it does when Lawrence shows us the smoke rising from the ground.

Here is another English writer—the evidence in her case is briefer, but conclusive. Romer Wilson died a few years ago; her death was little noticed and the Book Society did not go into mourning. Perhaps it was not then in being. Never mind—it is scarcely likely that it would have troubled. Romer Wilson had not a great many readers, although for one novel, *The Death of Society*, she was given the Hawthornden Prize. This was in the Silver Age of the Hawthornden Prize. In her, genius was a short cut between the senses and the unconscious mind. She had as sharp an ear for the future as Lawrence and she, too, heard little that was comfortable. (Read *Dragon's Blood* for a premonition of the madness and bitterness that served Hitler's turn.) But her original virtue was the sensuous quickness with which she leapt at what is living and essential in any man or woman. What we touch in the men and women in her books is the naked rage of their life, articulate in their words and deeds. She is not interested in the inessential clothing of speech and deed in which we embed our few real feelings, those rare experiences in which we are wholly—with every sense and nerve—involved. She told me once that she wrote without any deliberate or conscious intention. For long periods she felt no impulse to write; then the imperative need seized her and, shutting herself away, she wrote what it told her

to write, until she was exhausted. If Mr. or Miss So-and-so had told me that their endless mechanically functioning novels were inspired, I should not believe a word of it. I believed Romer Wilson because no fragment she left, however trivial, is less than alive.

The nature of genius, then, seems to involve an extreme sensitivity to the sounds, sights, and hidden essential forms of all life. The response which the sensitised nerves of the artist makes to his world varies according to an infinite number of accidents—as a love of going much into company or dis-taste for it, having a robust sensual body or one crippled or sickly, having a Catholic or a Calvinist as nurse. Time runs through these differences. There are epochs when the artist has enough to do copying out the actual forms of his world. The sharpened senses of the artist of 1935 seem to feel the pressure of forces which are still below the surface of our world, working in it to change, perhaps to destroy it. The note of warning, of uneasy fear, is persistent in all the older serious writers—that is, worth serious attention—Lawrence and T. S. Eliot among them. A writer so essentially liberal as E. M. Forster, the most exquisitely balanced mind among living writers, has practically ceased to write. One could think that his apprehensions of what is happening in the world are too much for him. The significant work of sculptors—

Henry Moore, John Skeaping—is profoundly disturbing. There is a Skeaping, the figure of a naked young woman, in which the uneasy intellect in the face is contradicted by the exaggerated peasant heaviness of the body—a lapse into barbarism (perhaps after another war?) could breed just such a type from the cultured and mentally alert woman of 1935.

It is easier to describe water than to give an account of genius. To say—it is perhaps true—that it is born in a peculiar instability or tension or susceptibility of the nerves, as if the nervous system were less or more highly charged with the electric fluid, is to say as much as we say of running water when we announce its rate of flow. But there is perhaps here a germ of the cause why there are so few women of genius. Tension and instability of the nervous system do not fit well with childbearing, and perhaps only after innumerable generations in which part of the women deny their biological function will the nervous condition of genius begin to be as common in women as men. It is an interesting speculation—and not less so because of what it implies. What happens meanwhile in a world in which the white peoples are always growing fewer? It may be noted in passing that one half of the affair is beginning to move. But do not let us look for a crop of female geniuses in this decade or the next but ten.

The sensitive instability explains perhaps, a little, why a writer of genius can give as good an account of women as of men. Any talented writer with acute observation and a mastery of colloquial speech can produce semblances of men and women to fill his pages and pockets. The impulses which actually move men and women—to acts of devotion, meanness, heroism—are only guessed at by him, if so much. And he, or she, will naturally make the more accurate guesses in what we may call the native sex of either. But these profound impulses are human—‘common are to either sex,’ as the most useful of poets has said—and the pain of genius is to feel them at their most intense and expose them with the most unflinching truth. Compare the male characters invented by that highly talented writer Charlotte Brontë with the male presences in *Wuthering Heights*. Emily Brontë may never have noticed that men’s clothes differed from women’s, but she knew by experiencing it the rage of male jealousy, anger, and tenderness, and it is there pressed out living. Compare Arnold Bennett’s shrewd gossipy chatter about the little tricks of domesticated women with the exposure of the physical woman in Joyce’s Marion Bloom.

Both instances suggest another characteristic of genius—exuberant nervous vitality, which may last through a more than normal lifetime, as in William Blake, or may burn out its possessor in a few years.

Vitality from this source can take the place of bodily robustness: perhaps it always happens that nervous vitality is fed by the other, and that we only do not notice it when a man as strong as a giant is in question. It is, one hopes, needless to add that the nervous vitality of genius has no other relation with the gross physical vitality which encourages Mr. and Miss So-and-so to continue writing the same book or painting the same picture year in and year out to vomiting.

Have we the right to speak of 'a genius for friendship'? That goes, I think, too far. A talent for friendship—yes, it is only a talent, a fine one, but that could as easily be debased to acting or diplomacy, which makes its owner a glove to fit any hand. But here I recall James Boswell. If it had not been for his determination to be a friend we should never have known that he was a genius.

1935.

Another of those trivial pieces in which my obsessions appear so plainly that I am startled. It is as though one threw a few shells into a box and found a year or two later that they had arranged themselves in the form of a skeleton.

Technique for Living

It seems that I am one of those who spend their lives practising how to live. There must be a great many of us, and it is on their behalf, on behalf of the others, that I am willing to take up some account. What is happiness? what is a good life? I know one answer, but it is not complete. The good way of life is that one which leads us to live in our world (which perhaps we did not choose and can by no means alter) with the least possible unpleasantness between it and us, and the finest use for our energies. An excellent answer. The more I look at it the better I like it, and the drier it appears. My quarrel with my world goes on, and, tired of it, I see that any tree has a better discipline of life, knows what it wants—that is, to grow—and finds means to do that without any noise.

What I desire and what my world offers me have not fitted. If this conflict should not be settled before I am, I mean before my death—I can think of more than one way of ending this sentence but none of them is worth writing at my age. In the eleventh century a man might choose

to resign a life of action and turn monk because his desire for learning drew him that way. He chose the half of life he most needed, letting the other wither in him. A short breathing-space came in England just before the industrial revolution—men could live in the world and have freedom to think—the world seemed to move at about the pace of a man's thoughts. To-day, the two have drawn apart so far that not one man in a million lives as he thinks. The world is moving at terrific speed on a course for which no charts have been drawn, and as if it were not anxiety enough not to know where we are rushing we must always fear being left behind, as too old or too slow. Anxiety kills more people than war. The race of men has grown vastly rich and powerful—the feeblest of us with his fingers on a switch commands hellish powers—and vastly, fearfully insecure. Where can we find leisure? what shall we hope? what do we believe?

What, if you were a writer, would you name success? To be read by a great many persons? Then you must write only what a great many persons wish to hear—you must persuade them that their lives, lived between two walls, have a meaning, a splendour. If they are afraid—and who is not?—you must soothe their doubts; ignorant, you may lead them into the world; and you may make them laugh or cry if you know

the motions. Confide in them, be very friendly and open. Above all, do not think what few wish to hear, or feel what most miss.

The devil of it is that not one of us, not the stupidest and the least sensitive, but thinks at his most secret of what he would much rather forget, and feels, when he is feeling freely and not as he has been told to, an agony or an ecstasy he cannot use. A writer who wishes to be honest—to be himself, as we say, and not a rag-bag—must write of these things, must throw away what he comes first to, and bring out his essence. Only to find that no one will buy from him this honesty, which disturbs, perhaps is scarcely decent, or kind. Then what? To withdraw? to find a room in a tower, furnish it, live retired and as sparsely as possible? But this mutilates the self as grossly as a dishonest success. X——, who writes (as I think) dishonest easy books, pleases everyone with them and can see Vienna when he likes. What shall it profit a man if he gains his soul and loses the whole world?

Before I understood the problem I lived it. When I was a child I had already looked round me to be famous, to see the world, in a word, to be free. I was born stubborn, unwilling to learn what I did not like. I read for pleasure and to astonish my teachers. As I look over my shoulder at those years they divide: beginning in eternity I came early into the way of time. From thirteen,

the years are marked off by the examinations that fell in December or June. I went at these like a man cutting steps in a rock. They were my road to the world. I had no guide, other than my devouring ambition—it was not guide, but goad. I was hungry for knowledge, all knowledge. The other day, turning the pages of an old encyclopædia, I found words pencilled in a round hand beside the articles on Hegel, Kant, Leibnitz, and some others, and I remembered what I had long forgotten, a resolve I had when I was fifteen to read all the philosophers: it seemed proper to begin by reading about them and so I pursued them through the eleven heavy volumes with (you can be sure) as little pleasure as understanding.

We have a cruel saying in my part of the world—‘Let want be your master.’ For years I striving with my savage company of wants made a battle-field of my life. I wanted learning with fame, and great possessions with peace. After the War, when I came to try my fortune in London, I ran to picture galleries and coveted the paintings for my own: an apt pupil, I learned anything I could about a way of life, of living, traditions, which are supported by money and cannot exist without it, and there were times when I was determined at any cost to have money.

For a poor man to become rich needs more than energy, greed, discontent. It needs a single mind,

and that I had not. There are values in living which are strictly incompatible with success. These I knew by sight. They came between me and my ambition, yet ambition would not stand aside for them, and I wore myself out serving as many masters as I had at that time minds.

This grew impossible—not only for me. In the world during these years something is abroad which can be called ‘the sense of the abyss’. All men feel unsafe. At an earlier moment in history men, threatened with disaster they did not know how to fight, might resign themselves and their will and spirits into the hands of God. But God has withdrawn out of mind. The only hands held out are those of a Leader.

For me, and for all who are of my mind, a Leader is nothing, useless, an impertinence. We cannot live in the life of another man, or of a State, or any other inhuman and bloody abstraction. Yet we don't like being lonely. We should like company, to be one of many, if we could have it, with freedom. We cannot engage ourselves to march blind. We must know what threatens, or saves, enquire freely the order of the day.

Now here is one thing I am certain of, among much that is uncertain. This is a time not to gather possessions but to discard what can be discarded. If we are to have change, a new journey, let us travel light. Stripped of unnecessary, now

unwanted, possessions what shall I have gained? At once—freedom from one anxiety. Ease—‘Leave comfort root-room.’ But I have not a great deal to discard, or might I not find it more difficult? Nor is simplicity everything—peace is most what I need, a mind that wastes none of its energies in useless anger or despair. I know that peace is not rest from living—death is what we call that. It is active, a hard doing; it is to try the actions that satisfy us. So if I am to be free and to act freely—not always thinking, Can I say this, dare that?—I must throw down what burdens heart and mind, as did Christian: but I miss Christian’s way, and so do most of us now.

A man or woman with a burden is a nuisance to everyone. Mine is the feeling of being responsible for some people—which is not kindness—it is only the other side of my bitter sense of possession. I have never wanted anything in my life unless I wanted it with my whole self, and what I have had once is the harder for me to let go.

This is excusable in first youth, but after that it is hideous—learning to live becomes learning to give up. A young woman feels intensely responsible for her son. The idea that an accident or another war may destroy him is never out of her mind though she may not be thinking of it. This is all very well, and it is right she should loathe war, which kills to no purpose. But the

time comes when she is *not* responsible for him, or responsible only as much as she is for every other human being—to do as she would be done by.

Then, one must learn, and the sooner after leaving childhood the better, not to rely completely on any other human being. The longer this lesson takes to learn the harder, not the easier, it is. Once learned it becomes lighter. We learn our deepest emotions young, at the beginning of our lives, even if at first we are not very adroit. I can change at any age my taste in books, but not my way of falling in love or of being deceived—the ‘figure in the carpet’. My friend, N—, who married at eighteen, a few years later heard of her husband’s mistress: she went to great trouble to visit her, and tortured herself and her husband with questions and conjectures. She was irreconcilable. Their marriage really came to an end then: it lasted for two more years; by this time she was ill with jealousy and disappointment. She married a second time when she was thirty-one. I did not see her for eight years: she told me then that she had had much the same bitter experience, but on the second occasion, although she found herself behaving, *as if forced to do so*, almost exactly in the same ways, she had recovered quickly, before her marriage was injured. ‘You see, I had learned,’ she said smiling, ‘that one has no natural right to kindness. It is nothing unless freely given.’ Life

has one weapon the less against us when we can practise this feint.

At the end of this road—not everyone need go so far as the end to have it—is an extraordinary experience, one of the oddest in life. The exhilaration which springs from the sense of having lost everything. It is a feeling like no other, a curious form of spiritual intoxication, perhaps not repeatable.

I am very slow, but do not think that I have learned nothing about living. I now realise that life must be lived in its present moments—I have wasted half a lifetime living in the future. I wanted to live more than people ordinarily do. I can scarcely remember or believe how violent my hunger was. Its violence defeated it. Life is only intense when we allow it to live through us, in its own time—just as the moments of ecstasy always come uninvited and from the simplest things.

A few people are born who know at once how to live. D. H. Lawrence had a genius for living—he went at it naturally, as he wrote, in complete unselfconscious energy. I could address to him from myself the letter an Earl of Salisbury wrote in 1608 to the King's son. ‘Such is the disproportion between your Highness and me (you the son of Jupiter and I his poor beagle). . . .’ My distrustful awkward nature, as ashamed of its hopes as of its passions, is the very opposite of his. Yet even to me some aptness has been given with

time, in time. I learn, though slowly, not to leave myself naked to the weather moods of those I live with. My weak need to be approved—a child afraid of the incomprehensible anger of others—grows less with each time I ignore it. I learn patience, too—‘Patience exquisite, That plumes to Peace thereafter.’ I don’t know whether one should learn not to hate. Hate may be a bitter but a necessary astringent, to use sometimes if we are not to lose courage to enjoy a world which is destroying itself.

1935.

More obsessions. If after I am dead some friendly and inquisitive fellow-shade asks me: ‘What surprised you most when you were alive?’ I shall have to answer: ‘The lies which otherwise honest men told about war. And that so many people tolerated the existence of poverty.’ I have never been able to understand how we excuse the one simple fact that some children have much and others little. It is to me inexcusable. Biological inequalities are one thing, and unnatural (that is, non-biological) inequality another. Every now and then I am forced to realise freshly that there actually are people who believe that children are born divided into those who must have everything they need and the others who must put up with the leavings. It is always a shock.

On Patriotism

IF preferring England over other countries as a place to live in, and if an irrational pride in my English nurture, mark the patriot, then I am one. But I find myself unwelcome in a company which includes a number of persons of whom I disapprove as thoroughly as they of me. I am an unashamed Little Englander. I wish our Empire were no larger than Norway's, and our population of the same proportion. Then London would still be a habitable city, and the loveliest country in the world would not have been fouled with slums.

I was born fortunate—that is, in Whitby; and intolerant, that is, a Yorkshireman. The education I got settled me in my belief that to have character and to be English mean the same—which is precisely what Fichte had thought some years earlier about the Germans. I do not expect to die less convinced than I was then that the world would go on very badly without its English. My feeling for England is coloured by my fortunate birth. Had I been born, say, in a colliery town, in one of those streets of small featureless houses, divided from the neighbouring street by a row of closets, I should-

have felt less respect for my country. It is perhaps because I know what England can mean to a child that I find completely intolerable the thought of what it means to too many children, whose later memories, unlike mine, cannot rest secure between sea and meadow, the blue and the green. Whatever happens, I have known the very best England can give a thankful child.

A convention is growing up to pretend that the War did not affect one generation more than others. It is one of the ways, familiar and not unforgivable, in which we try to evade an unpleasant thought. Perhaps it is not of any moment that my generation was buried before it had time to speak, but why pretend that the survivors are not affected by their isolation and (more) by their learning at a green age what certain phrases—such phrases, let us say, as ‘national honour,’ ‘sacrifice,’ and the like—are worth in common reality. It was perhaps necessary for one of my nature and bringing-up to live through a Great War to learn that no country, not even England, can conduct a modern war without dishonouring herself. It is not merely that such a war, with its unparalleled opportunities for making a money profit, brings out all the lice, small and large. And not the repulsive anatomy of fear and cruelty exposed by the popular Press. These could be written off against the patience, courage, and decency of the soldiers and others. War profiteers

dishonour themselves, not their country. A country is only dishonoured by the deliberate acts of its effective rulers. We learned early that the wilful propaganda of lies is a necessary part of modern warfare—that is, the wilful poisoning of the minds of a whole people. No doubt it is also part of the normal process of government, whether in a dictatorship or in the conditions of an uneducated democracy. The habit formed by modern statesmen of writing their memoirs is useful in so far as it provides neat marginal illustrations of Cavour's words: 'What scoundrels we should be if we did for ourselves the things we are prepared to do for Italy.'

I have more than once had to realise—always with astonishment—that to become known as a pacifist is to incur the suspicion of being unpatriotic or un-English. It never fails to astonish me, only because I should have thought that less than a minute's reflection on the manner and effects of modern warfare would be long enough to fill every lover of England with the sharpest and most overwhelming anxiety to avert war. But belief still lingers that war is a proper expression of the fighting instincts of men. These romantic Old Believers have not grasped the fact that the machine has revolutionised the nature of war as completely as that of other human activities. War has become slaughter by numbers. Against machines which

deliver poison gas or a rain of white-hot steel human courage is as unavailing as human flesh. On the active side, it should be added that there is nothing heroic in dropping bombs on a city, and if it should be called a patriotic duty that will be a good reason for holding the word ‘patriotism’ to have become obscene in course of time. Lest it should be supposed that I am moved by nothing more serious than the natural distaste of a mother at the thought of her son being clumsily butchered, let me quote a soldier, Major-General Fuller: ‘There is no chivalry in modern war, there is little heroism, there is no pity. . . . This is not war, this is massacre, the ritual of the slaughter-house . . . this foul contest of machines.’

If there were no other argument why an Englishman should hate war for his country, England in 1935 should provide it. The dead are dead, but that incalculable loss—who can tell what we lost?—is not the end of it. The nations are still paying for their reversion to cannibalism, and not least in the persistence of the fears and passions which swayed us in 1914, and the portent of an arrogant and repressive nationalism.

With my mind on this, I doubt whether I am eager to call myself patriotic when I read that the word has been called out by an armaments’ manufacturer to describe the success of his earnest efforts to sell his wares abroad. Now, I have no objection,

on the score of honesty, to a man who says: 'My trade is making shells and guns for killing men and I intend to sell these at a profit to any nation which is prepared to pay for them; I am not responsible if my guns are at some time turned against my own people, even it may be against my own son; this has happened in the recent past, it may happen again, it is unfortunate, but I am not responsible.' I may be unwilling to share in the profits of his trade, from my squeamish dislike of the human butcher's business. But that he should look to be praised as a patriot for his profitable neutrality is too much for me. If this is patriotism, then I feel none.

And yet I think I do. It is in my mind that no one truly loves England without he also hates war and distrusts the men who make a profit from it. I cannot respect the writer of a letter refusing to read a book I edited lately because (said he) he 'understood it was anti-war and all this anti-war talk is anti-English'—it seems to me an awkward sort of love, nearer vanity, which this man and others who are of his opinion bear their country.

So, I am a Little Englander on one side (the left—the side of the heart), and on the other I try to be a good European. Much good it will do us now to talk of Isolation, standing on the edge of a continent which can be overrun in a few hours by air. Nor can I find anything comfortable in the equally

irrational fantasy of building (only for our defence) more aeroplanes than every other country is building (for its defence). . . . I am astounded when I read such words as these, which appeared in an Isolationist newspaper lately: ‘Britain should resolutely refuse to enter any international conference the majority of which were foreigners.’ For ill or good England is a close part of Europe and will remain so until aeroplanes are forbidden to be built. In Europe the majority of the nations have the misfortune to be foreigners, and close enough to us to make living with them uncomfortable and dangerous, if it is not regulated. In such circumstances we ought to sit in conference with them the whole time, for our safety’s sake. The apostles of Isolation, as resolute to avoid knowing the truth as the village that voted the earth was flat, quaver: ‘Don’t interfere, keep out, avoid trouble’—as if troubles which live in the same room with us can be avoided by the gesture of turning our backs. It does not matter what political colours the different countries choose to wear, and even if they should all be Soviet Republics, consultations and the constraint of offences will still be necessary in so crowded an area. My pride and belief in England are such that I would rather she took more, not less, part in the business of Europe, interfered more often, and spoke—with the certainty of being listened to—in a less lawyer-like and equivocal voice.

I have another touchstone for patriots, but little pleasure in using it. When I meet a man (or woman), not blind or a cripple or in any other way cut off from the use of his senses, and find him less than passionately willing to change the social condition of this country I consider that he is only as good a patriot as my cat, who is satisfied so long as she has her own ration of cream and warmth. There are in this country too many unfortunate children —undernourished, shoddily clothed, living in dirt. At an age when other children are playing games and passing to another stage in their education these have begun some employment which, if a gently-nourished boy or girl were set to it, you would think unchildlike. How is it possible to love one's country and not feel bitterly ashamed of the familiar cruelty which gives to one child the most exquisite care and to another, no less sensitive or intelligent, squalor, poor insufficient food, and early toil? All the reasons by which we account for this piece of savagery do not excuse it.

There is no excuse. If the best milk, clean air, daily baths, warmth, are thought necessary for any child they are necessities for all. To rob even one child of what is necessary to his growth is considered detestable, except if the child should be too poor to be worth much trouble. There may be, there are, reasons why many children's lives are poisoned at their birth—by their crime of being

born to women who are without money. But there is no excuse. It sometimes seems that complacence is the only sin. Certainly it is the meanest.

Suppose a visitor from another country, eager to know England by sight, and you his guide. It is not only to save him the trouble of holding his nose that you will avoid taking him into the poorer quarters of the town. Most of us, though not all—a shipowner in my own town commented on the Welfare Centre that poor women are all sluts and ought to be left to their diseases—are ashamed of our slums. The district of Westminster contains some buildings which will charm the visitor, as well as houses with ‘husband, wife and five young children living in two rooms. Two children have died there. The rooms are infested with rats. A dog is kept in the room while the children sleep to protect them.’ Again, Kensington is considered a very healthy quarter, but not by the basement dwellers of the Portobello Road: ‘there were five families in this house—approximately thirty people—with one working water closet. Sewage water comes into some of these cellars, forced back from the sewers, and . . . for every three cases of infantile rheumatism in the southern half of the borough there are forty-three cases in the north.’ Here is an East End priest speaking: ‘Why is it that the whole horrible thing—these vile, leaky, verminous houses, these insane conditions of un-

speakable overcrowding—still goes on? For it does go on!'

And if you pull down all the 'vile, leaky, verminous houses' you still have left a monstrous sarcoma of nasty streets, not insanitary by the book, but congested, airless, and sordidly ugly. The England I could be content with will not be built until every unlovely street and quarter has been razed and in their place rise cities and towns planned by architects, engineers, artists, and doctors working together. There are not wanting heads and hands to make this dream real. Why should we be satisfied with less?

And how long will this country bear the burden of its ruined areas?—'towns such as Jarrow, where only one man in every four has a job. . . . Friends and relations cannot help one another, because all are straitened in the same way. Everything superfluous has been pawned or sold by the time unemployment has continued for many months, and the necessities of life are largely worn out or broken. In Jarrow, where many shops are shut, you may see the rare sight of even a pawnshop closed. These people are living on the very margin. Clothes come largely from charity. Underclothes are rare. The men are not starving, but they are permanently hungry.' (*The Times*, March 21st, 1934.)

If Jarrow had been the only town in England

where men and women do not know what it is to have enough to eat, we should be shocked into sending them in food, as we are shocked by a mine disaster into opening relief funds. But since it is only one of many towns and villages without a future and since no town or city is without men who 'are permanently hungry' and mothers who starve themselves to have a little more for their children, we have become used to the thought that a great number of our fellow-countrymen are dying of the slow cancer of poverty.

It is scarcely even a thought to us. We call it a problem, debate it and set up commissions to study the incidence of hunger, as if it were something less than a beastly cruelty for some to eat well while others are tormented by half-hunger. Jarrow and the rest are diseased cells in the body of England, and this disease is caused by stupidity and social senility; it is a plain disgrace to us. We should be ashamed of it, and ought to go on being ashamed until England is clean of her leprosy.

In the end, and because I have imagined that there are fewer complacent people in England than anywhere, and because I believe that the English are the subtlest and most nearly civilised of peoples, I grudge the waste involved in our social disorder. Until all children, without respect of their birth, are brought up with the same care for their health and comfort, and given during their early years the

same training in mental and bodily exercises, we cannot know what talent and what aptitudes we have at disposal in our nation. There is no sense or reason in a method of living which compels one boy to work like a galley slave to get himself an education and hands it to another whether he wants it or not, and whether he can benefit himself or his country by it or not. Education ought certainly to be entirely classless—that is, no child should be given a worse education than he is fitted for. But Heaven forbid that our present methods of education should be taken as a model. Half the disorders we suffer from, individual and social, begin in the divorce of work from pleasure and dignity—I would have every child taught a craft and the proper use of his body, before I troubled his mind overmuch.

Not long since I spent a short time at Wincham Hall, near Northwich, a place where a fine effort is being made for workless men. Among these men, of whom some have been out of work already five or six years, are several of the same age as my son. What conceivable wisdom or justice is there in a society which leaves these boys to rot when they cannot find work, while my son continues a prolonged education at Cambridge? Some among them showed an intelligence which could have been used; all could have given England something. It would be comfortable to think that every child

sent out to work at fifteen deserved no kinder fate. Comfortable and a lie. A few weeks ago a working girl who had been backward from childhood and 'appeared to be of extremely low intelligence' was discovered by the Institute of Medical Psychology in London to possess 'exceptional mental gifts.'

England will never again be a happy and secure nation until every child is born fortunate because born in England. The misery and hopelessness of one section of our people, the dissatisfaction of others, are a proof not that we are a poor nation but that we do not know how to use our riches. Our biological and technical inventiveness have increased to such a degree that the next generation might be the first not to know the smell of poverty. There need not be one other young man cheated, as those young men at Wincham have been cheated, of their proper life; not one other child to die from trying to live in leaky verminous houses or to be reared in vile surroundings; not one mother left to die from want of food, as Mrs. Weaver died last year in this rich country.

If we had the will to do this, we could do it. We could begin this same day. But in this day Englishmen are not valued so high as machines. Too many of them are without even the hope of life. This frightful comment comes from one of the young men at Wincham on a speech made to them by a visitor: 'Much good it does talking to

us about future generations—we can't marry or have children.'

I am sworn not to cease talking and writing about these things. First, since there is no reason other than lack of common will why England should not become a nation of free men and women, nor indeed equal in skill or quality but all equally apt to use such skill and quality as they have to the best purpose. Anything less is an open cheat. I cannot respect any man who is content to enjoy a comfort and security that others of his countrymen have not. The will to see England rebuilt, her every child happy, well reared, faithfully and wisely bred, is the only degree of patriotism I understand. Any colder or more neutral sort is apt to look no different from the anxiety to preserve the comforts and privileges of a class.

There is no doubt, but an England reformed at home would be attentively listened to abroad. 'Why else was this Nation chos'n before any other, that out of her as out of *Sion* should be proclaim'd and sounded forth the first tidings and trumpet of Reformation to all *Europe*.'

This essay was written for Fact, for an issue called 'Writing in Revolt'. It was a singularly inapt title—foolish, too: writers may revolt, though surely not in a vacuum, but writing? Neither the theory nor the examples offered could have been labelled revolutionary in any proper sense of that bundle-word. This essay is as mild, orthodox and one-sided as the annual conference of the Conservative Party, and much more so than any Mothers' Meeting. But then a Mothers' Meeting, in Yorkshire at any rate, could give points in revolutionary outlook to any nest of singing rebels in Bloomsbury or elsewhere.

New Documents

I BELIEVE we should do well to give up talking about proletarian literature and talk about socialist literature instead—and mean by it writing concerned with the lives of men and women in a world which is changing and being changed. A socialist must be intimately concerned with this change; he must be struggling continually to understand it. His writing must reflect his experience of it and his understanding of his experience. And since the change is world wide, and is taking place on innumerable levels at once and all the time, the difficulty of attempting to write anything on the scale of *War and Peace* is so great as to make it unlikely that it will be written—yet. The difficulty excuses none of us for retreating into a world made artificially static by excluding from it all the factors of change and the rumour of the real world.

Literature concerned with change and the changing world is concerned with revolution, and with all the stages of revolutionary action. The type of socialist hero is a revolutionary (required reading is Ralph Fox's *The Novel and the People*),

and here, if he is a novelist, the writer is not likely to be able to create a revolutionary hero under the eyes of the living Dimitroff. Even Tolstoi, writing fifty years after Waterloo, is not able to make a figure of Napoleon; Stendhal, a greater writer, and a contemporary, does not try. It is perhaps necessary (this is not the place to consider it) for a really great figure to become diminished in time before he can be re-created by the imagination, which can tackle lesser men (a Baldwin, for example) easily enough. Note that in Ralph Bates's novels his heroes are least convincing when they are behaving as revolutionaries. In quarrelling, in gathering olives, in enduring, they appear as whole men. Compare the hero of Malraux's *Days of Contempt* with the figure of Dimitroff; he is a shadow. Compare him with himself—he begins to be alive only when he leaves the prison and is talking to his wife.

The use of the term 'proletarian novel' suggests, quite falsely, that socialist literature ought to concern itself only or mainly with working-class life. In fact, a novel about a Lord Invernairn, written from full insight into what this man actually is doing, a novel which exposed him, laid him open, need not bring on to the stage a single one of the people who do not exist for him as human beings. It would still be socialist literature. The process of change, of decay, of growth, is taking place

everywhere all the time: it does not matter where you open up the social body if you know what you are looking for.

This misconception is not the worst of it. The worst is a dreadful self-consciousness which seizes the middle-class writer who hears the command to sell all he has and write a proletarian novel. He discovers that he does not even know what the wife of a man earning two pounds a week wears, where she buys her food, what her kitchen looks like to her when she comes into it at six or seven in the morning. It has never happened to him to stand with his hands in greasy water at the sink, with a nagging pain in his back, and his clothes sticking to him. He (or she) actually has to take a look into the kitchen to know what it smells and looks like. At that he does not know as much as the woman's forefinger knows when it scrapes the black out of a crack in the table or the corner of a shelf.

The impulse that made him want to know is decent and defensible. If he happens to have been born and brought up in Kensington the chances are that he has never lifted the blind of his own kitchen at six in the morning, with thoughts in his mind of tumbled bed-clothes, dirty grates, and the ring of rust on the stove. But there is something very wrong when he has to contort himself into knots in order to get to know a worker, man or

woman. What is wrong is in him, and he cannot blame on to his upbringing what is really a failure of his own will; it is still clenched on his idea of himself, given to him by that upbringing, but now to be cast off as the first condition of growth. Too much of his energy runs away in an intense interest in and curiosity about his feelings. ‘What things I am seeing for the first time! What smells I am enduring! There is the woman raking ashes with her hands and here I am watching her!’ This self-centred habit is not peculiar to the middle-class writer, but it is natural to him. If, as a child, he had escaped from the nursery and been found in some Hoxton backyard he would have been bathed and disinfected and made conscious of having run an awful danger, much as though he had been visiting savages. The mental attitude persists. Breeding will out!

The first thing a socialist writer has to realise is that there is no value in the emotions, the spiritual writhings, started in him by the sight, smell, and touch of poverty. The emotions are no doubt unavoidable. There is no need to record them. Let him go and pour them down the drain.

The writer living in one moment of time and in one society, and perpetually conscious of another trying to break through, has been set a task which calls for special discipline and effort. He must enquire into a revolution, but he cannot create a

revolutionary hero as impressive as the still living Dimitroff. If he could, he would be mentally of the size of Dimitroff and, at the present instant, that would lay on him the compulsion to work in other ways than as a writer. He must not, he ought not to indulge himself in self-analysis, since that is to nail himself inside his own small ego at a moment when what is individual to each man is less real, less actual, than that which he shares with every other man—insecurity, the need to become a rebel for the sake of human dignity. What then should he do?

A task of the greatest value, urgent and not easy, is waiting to be done. George Orwell has begun on it in the first half of *The Road to Wigan Pier*. The instinct which drives a writer to go and see for himself may be sound. If a writer does not know, if his senses and imagination have not told him, what poverty smells like, he had better find out. Even if in the end he prefers to write about Invercnaire or Krupp. But if he goes for his own sake, for some fancied spiritual advantage to be got from the experience, he had better stay at home: his presence in Wigan or Hoxton is either irrelevant or impudent. He must go for the sake of the *fact*, as a medical student carries out a dissection, and to equip himself, not to satisfy his conscience or to see what effect it has on him. His mind must remain cool; he must be able to

give an objective report, neither superficial nor slickly dramatic. And, for pity's sake, don't let us have any 'slices of life' in the manner of the Naturalists of the 'eighties. In their determination to show life up they became as sentimental, as emotionally dishonest, as Miss So-and-so 'embosoming freely' with her readers in the fiction columns of the women's magazines. For their own purposes they counterfeit reality as obtusely as she does.

The conditions for the growth of a socialist literature scarcely exist. We have to create them. We need documents, not, as the Naturalists needed them, to make their drab tuppenny-ha'penny dramas, but as charts, as timber for the fire some writer will light to-morrow morning. The detailed and accurate presentment, rather than the presentation, of this moment, and this society. A new *Comédie Humaine*—offered to us without the unnecessary distorting gloss of the writer's emotions and self-questionings. Writers should be willing to go and live for a long enough time at one of the points of departure of the new society. To go, if you like, into exile. Without feeling heroic, or even adventurous, or curious about their own spiritual reactions. Willing to sink themselves for the time, so that they become conduits for a feeling which is not personal, nor static.

They might, for instance, tell us what is stirring,

if anything, in one of those Durham mining villages about which a staid report in *The Times* says that 'no hope exists for thousands of men and boys ever to lead a normal working life again'. A report made by two women doctors to the Council of Action on Motherhood in the Special Areas of Durham and Tyneside remarks, 'It was amazing that in this country people should be living in such dens, that mothers should go through their pregnancies there and infants be born.' I don't know who reads these reports with their ghastly 'cases'. They are not documents in the proper sense of the word; they are not full enough; they do not give the essentials of speech and action. They could not: the observation, however acute, is made from outside, too briefly, and as a stranger would report upon strangers after an hour's visit. We do not see the woman stripping the filthy, bug-ridden wallpaper from the thin wall of her attic; nor the pregnant woman waiting her turn for the lavatory which serves eight families (forty people); nor the gesture of the woman setting on the table the little pie she has bought for her consumptive child; nor the workless man looking at the soles of his shoes when he comes home. It is necessary that a writer should have lived with these things for him to record them as simply and coldly, even brutally, as if he chooses he can describe what has been familiar to him from his infancy. Something can

be discovered in an hour's visit, but not the quick. Not the seed, if it exists here, of a different growth.

It is not necessary—in a great many instances it would be impossible or undesirable—for a writer to work alone. He might work with other writers, if it were decided to report on a district or a town (see the American classic in this sort, *Middletown*). He can enlist the help of social workers to supplement his own experience of such specifically modern horrors as the effects on girls and young women of 'rationalisation' in the factory. (When Charlie Chaplin goes mad, in a recent film, unable to stop himself jerking at anything that looks like the top of a screw, he is caricaturing a horrid reality: the girls from one of these rationalised factories cannot keep their hands still; they walk round the club room nipping off the heads of flowers, turning off the heating; they jerk and twitch and scream.)

A writer living in a Nottinghamshire mining village could not possibly do his job properly without the help of confidential reports from the workers themselves which he would have to wait for and deserve by his behaviour. He could not expect the wife of a miner living in one of the new 'compounds' to tell him at sight how she likes shopping in an employer-owned store. Why, he might be in the pay of the Economic League. (The connections and activities of this organisation deserve a document to themselves—more than one.)

A well-placed novelist might bring out a double-sided record: one day or one week in the life of a family of five living in one of the wealthier residential districts of the West End (if he or she can find one which has so far forgotten itself as to breed), set down opposite the life during the same length of time of a similar (in ages, size, etc.), of a Paddington, Hoxton, Lambeth family. Again, this might be team work.

The number of documents to be got is infinite. How are they to be presented? This is the crux. A journalist can observe and report. No writer is satisfied to write journalism, nor is this what is wanted—visits to the distressed areas in a motor-car. Nor must the experience, the knowledge waited for and lived through, be counterfeited, in the sense of making up a story or a novel on the basis of facts collected (e.g. *The Stars Look Down*, by Cronin). Perhaps the nearest equivalent of what is wanted exists already in another form in the documentary film. As the photographer does, so must the writer keep himself out of the picture while working ceaselessly to present the fact from a striking (poignant, ironic, penetrating, significant) angle. The narrative must be sharp, compressed, concrete. Dialogue must be short—a seizing of the significant, the revealing word. The emotion should spring directly from the fact. It must not be squeezed from it by the writer, running forward

with a 'When I saw this, I felt, I suffered, I rejoiced. . . .' His job is not to tell us what he felt, but to be coldly and industriously presenting, arranging, selecting, discarding from the mass of his material to get the significant detail which leaves no more to be said, and implies everything.

And for goodness' sake let us get some fun out of it. Nothing is less to our taste, and less realist, than the inspissated gloom of Naturalism. A novel by Ignazio Silone, *Fontamara*, offers itself as a model—this tragic, bitter story of a village is extremely funny, and sticks faster in the memory by it. Let us write decent English, too; not American telegraphese. Social documents are familiar in our literature. The sermons of preaching friars are still alive where the preacher threw in a scene that was under his eyes as he walked about—often a savage indictment of poverty created by greedy merchants and landlords.

For the sake of compression—the field to be covered is, after all, enormous—and for the sake of sharpness, much must be left out that a writer will be tempted to put in. For one thing, 'atmosphere'. It has been overdone, too—all those novels in which infinite pains have gone to the evocation of rain and moonlight, novels 'set' in Cornwall, in Sussex, in Paris and Patagonia. For another thing, the static analysis of feeling, and thought. No more peeling of the onion to strew

the page with layer after layer. No stream of consciousness—that famous stream which we pretend to see flowing, as in the theatre we agree to pretend that the stream on the back-cloth flows. No commentary—the document is a comment. No æsthetic, moral, or philosophic enquiry—that is, none which is not implicit. To say this is not to say that a novel such as *The Root and The Flower* is of no value. It is of the greatest value and it is concerned with those human values we are trying to save. It offers—in a form entirely unsuitable to our present purpose—a criticism of social values which is just and suggestive. Its method is useless to us—for a good reason. We must be field workers in a field no smaller than England, our criticism of values implied in the angle from which we take our pictures. By choosing this detail, this word, rather than another from the mass offered us, we make our criticism, our moral judgements.

Writers write to be read. If they are not read, by as many people as will do to keep them vigorously alive, they have failed as writers. People will listen even to what is disagreeable to them if the speaker's tone takes them by the ear. The Naturalists flung tear-sodden lumps of raw life in the public's face and complained because the public went home to amuse itself in its own way. There is a technical job to be done. It can't be done until the instruments have been made and improved, as astronomy

had to wait on a lens. How to make people listen to what they don't want to hear. How not to bore the people who do want to hear. If they want to hear, you say, they'll take anything. But why should they? Why should they be bored by what is nothing more or less than incompetence or amateurishness? It is not a question of setting out to be a best-seller—if that is what you want there are shorter and easier ways—but of learning a craft. Again the relevant comparison is with the documentary film. It takes a sharpened and disciplined mind to handle a mass of material in such a way that only the significant details emerge. We're confronted by the extreme difficulty of finding phrases which are at once compressed and highly suggestive. It's hardly a job for an amateur unless he happens to be a genius. (When a genius arrives he can and will look after himself.)

The isolation of writers from each other is almost as deadly as their isolation from the life of farmers, labourers, miners and other men on whom the life of the nation depends. If something of this unnatural apartness can be broken down, by writers working together, by their coming into relation with their fellow-men and women, they may, between them, provide the conditions, the warmth, for a new literature. We have been attending the death-bed of an old one for some time; a birth is about due. It may actually be

the birth of a great writer, and the documents we have collected, the activity we have stirred up, will form the conditions into which he is born. They will shape him and he will use them. A great writer has more than one father and mother, as well as more than one nurse.

One technical difficulty remains to be solved. The solution may turn up one day, in the course of the experiments going on all the time. This is the frightful difficulty of expressing, in such a way that they are at once seen to be intimately connected, the relations between things (men, acts) widely separated in space or in the social complex. It has been done in poetry. At certain levels of the mind we see and feel connections which we know rationally in another way. In dreams things apparently distinct are seen to be related (but Surrealism is not the solution). We may stumble on the solution in the effort of trying to create the literary equivalent of the documentary film.

This essay was first delivered as a lecture in Leeds University. I think it is not very rhetorical—fortunately. On re-reading it I am startled by the change which has come over my mind in the short time since I wrote it. I have not, since then, altered any of the convictions that have been growing in my mind since I went up, a raw schoolgirl, to Leeds University. What has altered is the stress which, dictated to us by our emotions, we lay on this and that aspect of a belief. My mind moves with extreme slowness. I trudge along, aware sometimes that the stones are vexing my feet, at others only aware of the form of the country, and unexpectedly find that I have moved into new country.

When I had given this lecture, a friend, to whose wit and intellect I am always on my knees, was angry with me for my critical (as I had hoped) attack on Surrealism. It would only, she said, give satisfaction to those persons who damn every new growth in art, hating and fearing it because it is new. Now, it is true that my comments on Surrealism in a lecture not devoted to it were incomplete. I had a great deal more to say, a great deal more I could say if I had time. But I cannot admit that one should not tell the truth as one sees it, even though it will make the wrong people rejoice—for the wrong reasons. It is the old quarrel of expediency and justice, or truth. Very many writers have agreed that they will only speak their minds when it is expedient to do so. To further

a cause, a good cause, they will suppress others and themselves. I do not accept this. I never did, and I do so now less than ever. I am not competent to criticise publicly Surrealist painting—though I will do so in private with a good heart. But I am competent to criticise and to hold views on Surrealist writers. If they are right and I am wrong they are not harmed by my disapproval. They are not defenceless either. I may well be wrong. But my criticism is reasonable and pondered; it is not instinctive prejudice. My instinct, indeed, is always to defend what is new and a rebellion against authority. Thus I have worked for my enjoyment of the work of certain modern musicians, and certain modern painters. I should be willing to go on working to enjoy Surrealist literature if, after trial, my mind did not warn me how little worth the effort it is. This, at least, is my truth, and I should do wrong, I think, to suppress it.

The Novel in Contemporary Life

WE all know that a new, and to many people a very disturbing, influence has begun to move in literature during the last ten or fifteen years. That is a misleading way to put it. What I ought to say is that certain changes and threats of change in the world have forced themselves on the notice of writers with such energy that whether we want to or not we have not been able to ignore them. A great many writers do want to ignore them. It would be just as easy to ignore a thunderstorm when you are out in it. Something which has been going on in the world for a long time has reached a stage that alters everything. So that even those people who would rather not have been involved are involved against their will. It rains alike on the just and the unjust, on the unmitigated best-seller and the unmitigable serious writer. A new Battle of the Books has begun.

I attended what must have been one of the first, if not the first, private meeting at which a number of writers, who had come to see what it was about, were told that it was their duty not simply as persons but *as writers* to play an active political part. Some

of them were bewildered. A well-known and rather prosperous novelist kept on saying to me in a distressed voice: 'But do they mean I ought to give up art and write only propaganda?' Actually he had not much to give up, but it seemed worth while trying to reassure him. Propaganda is not the direct aim of the novelist.

Since that afternoon in London, writers have been recruited into companies and on to committees, they have been pressed for this side or that—always as writers. 'It's your pen we want.' It is impossible to discuss the contemporary novel unless you realise immediately that something is happening to it which is happening at the same time to every other human activity. In certain European countries the process has gone so far that a writer finds himself being interfered with both as writer and as human being. If he has the misfortune to be on the wrong side—or only to seem to be on the wrong side—he may be chased out of his country. Or shot, as Lorca was in Spain. Or, as Erich Mühsam was, tortured first and then murdered, in a concentration camp. Or, if left alive, asked to submit to a censorship which has the merit of being open. And no other merit.

To put it shortly, the novel is being affected profoundly, and not in any simple way, by the social and political climate of the present day. This has nothing whatever to do with the argument,

a quite silly and barren argument, about politics and the novel. To ask: 'Should politics come into the novel?' is only idiotic. Any conceivable thing can come into a novel if it comes in on the novelist's own terms. The change which is taking place in the world, at various levels, of which the political is only one, is of such violence that the novel cannot help being affected. It would be affected even if every novelist decided to pretend that nothing is happening. If you are in the rain you get wet.

Let us try to look at the English novel in 1937 as if we were not engaged, far too many of us, in writing it, and the others in reading it or being bored or irritated by it into reading something else—or going to the pictures. The first thing that strikes any critic is the immense competence and immense unimportance of the bulk of new novels. The test of a novel's importance is the response we make to it. It rouses certain impulses in us and satisfies them. The impulse may be weak and worthless, and our response negligible. Or we may receive a satisfaction that enriches and enlarges our minds. Unless the novel we are reading moves us in this way its value is no greater than that of a box of chocolates. And not different. You can say, 'I am a great reader of novels,' and mean exactly as much as you would mean by saying, 'I eat a lot of chocolates.'

When you look back on a year's reading of fifty

or a hundred novels—neatly-written, amusing, exciting—of how many can you say: ‘It changed me. Because of it I now feel more acutely, I see more deeply and understand better what happens to me’? Of the novels which do not pass this test it is useless to talk. We might just as well, just as profitably, discuss the merits of different kinds of chocolate. And the causes which have led to our having innumerable brands of chocolate to choose from are also responsible for the flood of competent neatly-written—and the rest of it—novels. We have become foolishly sophisticated because it was profitable to supply us with these luxuries—and in the absence of any check on our tastes or any standards except wilfully material ones. The novels are unimportant. The social standards to which they bear witness are not—but that is another question. And another aspect of the change taking place in the world.

Let us see what has been happening to certain novelists. One, who was undoubtedly a great artist, and a man who lived as he wrote, with the insight and honesty of genius, has died. D. H. Lawrence. He died in February 1930, a little before authors began to be exiled, enlisted, or shot, and before the change of which we have been speaking became so obvious and menacing that even popular novelists can see it. Lawrence, who was never a popular novelist, was aware of it almost from the

beginning of his life as a writer. Again and again in his novels he gives expression to his overwhelming sense that our material and mechanical civilisation has reached its limits, that it is going to be destroyed by forces it has repressed, that we are at last being presented with the bill for our past cruelty, greed, folly, for the ugliness we have wilfully created. 'We have no future; neither for our hopes nor our aims nor our art,' he says. 'Vitally, the human race is dying. It is like a great uprooted tree, with its roots in the air. We must plant ourselves again in the universe.' Lawrence died just in time, before his certainty—it was a personal certainty—of the continuity of human experience could be damaged by what is happening in 1937. It is one thing to foresee chaos. It is another to live in it.

Now take Virginia Woolf. Her latest novel, *The Years*, is an almost involuntary witness to the defeat of an artist whose success has depended on her being able to find in the outer world an image, a symbol, to which she can attach her remarkable capacity for feeling. Whenever, in her books, Mrs. Woolf has been able to convey, sharply and immediately, the impressions received by her senses, the truthfulness and value of her work are beyond question. She has an exquisite sensibility to sensuous impressions. Once she ventures outside the range of this sensibility she seems to have no feeling for

reality at all. A first reading of *The Years* is a bitter disappointment—the mechanical repetition of old images, the sentimentality which takes the place of emotion in these almost non-existent characters, the poverty of the thought. After a second and third reading one realises that the emotion is there. But it is an emotion of which the writer herself was perhaps not conscious. A sense of deadness, of falsity. These people give back a hollow tone when Mrs. Woolf touches them because they are hollow. They are finished. They are Lawrence's 'uprooted tree, with its roots in the air'. They have no future. Even the past is not alive in them. This book was praised and blamed not for what it is. Its truth is in the monotony, the staleness.

Another of our best novelists has ceased to write novels. Can we—in the case of E. M. Forster—assume that he finds it impossible to transmute into fiction, into his civilised and essentially sane fiction, his knowledge of what is going on in the world? To a sensibility as rare as Mrs. Woolf's he adds an ironical intellect in complete control of itself. We know that he is passionately alive to what is going on. Two years ago he took the trouble to attend the first international Congress of writers for the defence of culture, held in Paris. Possibly the speech he made there answers our question about him. 'You will say, perhaps,' he said, 'that if a

new war breaks out, writers of the liberal and individualist type, like Mr. Aldous Huxley and myself, will be simply swept aside. I am sure that we will be swept aside, and I consider as very possible a new war. . . . This said, my rôle and the rôle of those with the same sentiments as myself, is a temporary rôle. We must continue to potter about with our old tools until the moment when everything falls about our ears. When everything crashes, nothing will serve any more. After—if there is an after—the task of civilisation will be taken up by men whose spiritual training will be different from mine.' This courage, this personal integrity, of a great writer, is nevertheless not the mood in which it seems worth while making the effort to write a novel. Novels are not written pottering about with old tools, waiting stoically for the roof to fall in.

Nor, to look now at James Joyce, by a laboured and mechanical manipulation of language. The trouble with *Work in Progress* is not that it is obscure. Obscurity may spring from the writer's struggles to convey, under intense emotional pressure, some profound experience. The words are chosen, and perhaps forced together and distorted, by the creative need itself. Even if we had not been told how Mr. Joyce works up the text of *Work in Progress*, underlining the puns, multiplying and cramming in the allusions, we should

have known that his interest is not in what he is saying. It is in the building up of this spurious monument of verbal effects. Spurious because it is mechanical and deliberate. It is not dictated by an inner necessity. Some of the effects are charming, some are extremely interesting. But the total effect is of stupendous dullness, like a dozen mechanical pianos playing Scriabine at once. One can scarcely imagine anything more like Purgatory.

If this has been the effect of the climate of the last ten years on writers of genius, what has happened to a highly talented novelist, to Aldous Huxley? He has not only become an uncompromising pacifist, but forces himself to work actively for his faith. He makes speeches and writes pamphlets. His horror at what is going on in the world has driven him on to the platform at the Albert Hall. The hero of his latest novel is a pacifist. It is true that this novel is not intrinsically more satisfying than others of Mr. Huxley's. As a writer he has been half strangled by his acute consciousness of himself, his mind and his senses. His response to life, to experience, is arrested above the point where he would have come into immediate contact with what is fundamental and enduring in human beings. A much less clever, clumsier, more slipshod novelist, like Dickens, will come nearer the essential truth of a character. What is significant about Mr. Huxley in 1937 is to be discovered more in

what is happening to the man than in anything that has happened to the novelist.

For the rest, our best-selling novelists continue to write the books we expect from them. And now and then, in the torrent of new novels, you get one like *The Stars Look Down*—in which industry and talent combined with an acute news-sense to produce a book which has something more than the vividness of a journalist's account of an accident in a mine. You should notice that it had precisely the effect of journalism. It was eagerly read, by people who felt that they wanted to know the truth about a disaster like Gresford. It disturbed, it shocked, it interested—and it has been forgotten. Its author is now, with equal skill and vivacity, telling the truth about doctors.

Look at the torrent of new novels as it pours down and rushes past you. A name catches your eye, you snatch at it—it is gone. You read and enjoy a book. A month later, if you speak of it, no one remembers its name. The effect, in spite of the competence we have noticed, is of complete ineffectiveness. There are so many novels, and so many well-composed novels, and scarcely one a year that makes any dent on our consciousness. This peculiar ineffectiveness shows itself in two ways. It is felt by novelists themselves. Take two of the liveliest among the young writers—Arthur Calder-Marshall and C. Day Lewis. Not only

would neither of these young men try to live on his earnings as a novelist, but neither of them relies on novels to convey all he has to say about the world. Nor, you notice, does Mr. Huxley.

The other sign is precisely the fact of the torrent itself. I can think of as many as half a dozen novelists of intellectual distinction and sensibility who produce a novel a year. It is praised, and in a month it is forgotten. I think of writers like V. S. Pritchett and Gerald Bullett. Or of a novel like *The Root and The Flower*, by L. H. Myers. This remarkable book is concerned with those human values which underlie any form of society. It is a mature and subtle work. The torrent swept it into the oblivion of a few, a very few bookshelves.

One begins to see that in 1937 the novel is attacked and defeated from two sides. There is the suspicion, arising first in the minds of intelligent and serious novelists, that the novel is inadequate for what they want to say. And there is the economic defeat. Let us take this first, because it is simpler. Take a ludicrously simple illustration. A few weeks since one of the most intelligent literary agents in America invited me to send her synopses of as many long stories as I cared to write. 'American editors,' she wrote, 'are now willing to print the more serious, literary type of story.' Feeling sceptical but encouraged, I sent her the outline of four stories. She warned me immediately

not to think of writing any of them. American editors, she said, do not approve of illegitimate children, are violently prejudiced against stories in which a writer appears as a character, do not like certain subjects to be treated ironically, or directly, and prefer that a great many others should not be treated at all. It's not in itself of the least importance that in order to sell a story to a magazine you must pretend that the world is something other than it is. You need not write for the magazines. But the fact is that you are not merely shut out of this market. What is called magazine fiction does not remain in its proper place, between the advertisements of face cream and the pictures of what Arnold Bennett called 'fabulously expensive women'. It emerges as a serious competitor. Not only as a competitor. Its influence is much more insidious. It creates a taste for itself, it fixes a standard of popular success. Realise that magazine fiction tends, not deliberately but inevitably, to create a fictional world which is in keeping with the advertisement columns with their insistence on certain social values—for the most part snob values, appeals to vanity, social snobbery, and fear. This is not a conspiracy on the part of editors, writers, and advertisers. It is business as usual. It is part of the much wider movement of society towards a predominantly urban civilisation, with standards of luxury and leisure not fixed by any criterion of

need or taste but solely by income. Magazine fiction is, in fact, a standardised article. It concerns itself with stereotyped emotions and ideas, stock situations, an outlook on life which does not conflict at any level with the outlook of the big advertisers. D. H. Lawrence has described it. ‘The novel, like gossip, can excite spurious sympathies and recoils, mechanical and deadening. The novel can glorify the most corrupt feelings, so long as they are *conventionally* “pure.”’ Then the novel, like gossip, becomes at last vicious, and, like gossip, all the more vicious because it is always ostensibly on the side of the angels.’

Bad money drives out good; bad novels, novels warranted not to disturb, not to create a mood in which the purchase of a new motor-car might seem unnecessary or unimportant, drive out the others. The situation is more difficult for the serious writer now than it was only a dozen or fifteen years ago. A young and completely unknown writer stands very little chance to-day if his work shows signs that he is hopelessly given to writing the sort of novels which will make him an undesirable accompaniment to the snob-appeal of the advertisement pages. He has, of course, to struggle not only against the torrent of standardised fiction, but against tendencies to standardisation in the book market itself. You need only glance at the publishers’ advertisements in your Sunday paper to see how

many publishers now follow the sound business principle that it is better to advertise a few lines—the most popular ones—to the exclusion, and the final extinction, of others. The Book Clubs do their bit to smother the serious, the original, or the unknown novelist. Since they must satisfy the lowest common denominator of taste of their members their standards are fixed for them. The book they choose must help *them*. It must give satisfaction. In short, a novelist in 1937 must have qualities which have nothing to do with honesty, sensibility, and the rest—nothing to do with literature—if he hopes to live by his novels.

So much for the economic defeat. Now look for a moment at the other. At the suspicion, if it is no more, that the novel is inadequate to express all an intelligent writer feels about his times. To know whether this suspicion is just we must know two things. What is the particular job of the novelist—what does he try to do, in writing a novel, which is different from the effort of a painter or a musician? And, is there anything, any condition, or tension, in the society in which he works and lives that makes it difficult or impossible for him to do his job? I am not now speaking of economic difficulties *as such*, as they affect the writer, but of the social complex, the movement of society as a whole—this movement which shows

itself as a process of change, taking place all the time, at different levels, in every country.

The impulse which forces the novelist to write his novels is not in the end different from the one which drives a painter to paint, but it takes a different form and in doing so it deals with a different reality. With a different face of reality. The essential concern of the novel is with men and women *in their times*. With the passions and sympathies of men and women as these penetrate and are penetrated by the powerful social currents of their time. The novel can do other things, and in doing them it may move towards some other art, towards poetry, let us say. The novel is the least rigid of forms, and it is always being pulled and stretched to this side or that by the genius of particular novelists. But if we are to speak of the essential form of the novel, we must think of it as depicting in some way, in any way, the social landscape and climate in which the individual characters move. This can be done in more than one way. It can be done as Balzac does it, or it can be done by so enlarging the individual that society is mirrored in him and in his actions.

So you can say that in order to do his work properly the novelist must be a receiving station for the voices coming from every corner of the society he lives in. He need not report them *directly*, but he must hear them. He must be able

to say to himself: I hear of a death and I hear of a birth; I will show the truth of all these things, so that people may know what is going on, so that they may not cling in their hearts to what is dead, and become deaf and blind to what is living. It is because the novel can do this that it is important. Everything depends on the novelist being sensitive enough to detect the past and the future existing together in the present, and honest enough to turn the light on it, without caring what it reveals.

The first thing the novelist discovers when he turns the light on 1937 is what Lawrence called 'a gap in the continuity of consciousness'. 'The industrial England blots out the agricultural England. One meaning blots out another. The new England blots out the old England. And the continuity is not organic, but mechanical.' In the healthy life of a community the way in which men live, their mode of life, should grow out of the past experience of the community and towards a steadily developing future. But our great industrial communities have no roots in the past. A man's work is only connected with his life by his pay envelope. Nor can he believe that he is building his life into the future of his country. The future has shrunk to a narrow personal fear. To-morrow I may be out of work. To-morrow there may be war. In a society which has ceased to understand its past

and is not digging channels into the future there can be no living culture. We are approaching what Henry James called 'the awful doom of general dishumanisation'.

This doesn't mean that there is no new life stirring. It does mean that a society we think of as alive, because we see it moving, is only moving mechanically towards its own death—which may be ours. Those convulsive movements we see are producing the engines, the bombs and the poison gas which will destroy it. But something else is being born. There is a social instinct for self-preservation as well as a personal one. The sharpened senses of the novelist will warn him to find this new life, wherever it is—in a prison, a street, or a manger. Find it, recognise it and bring it gifts.

This process of social change, this new birth, as well as this old death, is the rainy country of the contemporary novel. Whether we see it or not—but the novelist *must* see it—something which is essentially a revolution is going on. In one way or another, the sense, the energy, of this revolution must come through his words. Or else he is not telling the truth about contemporary life. This is nothing to do with putting politics into the novel—nothing to do with propaganda. Propaganda—that is, conscious propaganda—is one use of words and it is not the novelist's use of them. And

politics are only one of the activities of men and women. If they appear in a novel they must do so not as politics but as a human activity, expressed through human passions and deeds. What in effect the novelist says is: Here is the social web I am uncovering for you. Look closely and you will see how men and women work, suffer, rejoice, and die in it, like fishes in water. Look closer still and you will see that the web itself moves, changes, and the human creatures with it.

You now see how very difficult the task of the contemporary novelist is. Like any other intelligent person he has to live on a great many levels of being at once—physical, social, intellectual. But he has to do more than this. He has to reach a point where he can see how these different human activities fit together to form a society which is all the time moving and changing. A novelist does, or ought to do, something more than draw characters in action. He forms a conception of life—such a conception, let us say, as Tolstoi offers in *War and Peace* or Jules Romains in his immense unfinished novel *Men of Good Will*—and he chooses events that will express it. The conception *is* the novel. It is the inner necessity from which the events, the story, grow. The characters spring from these events. They affect them, or try to, and are affected by them. When we criticise a novel we ought not to discuss whether the characters are pleasant or

unpleasant—that is not the business of an intelligent critic. What matters is the writer's conception of life. Is it true or false to the reality, and are the words he uses adequate to express it?

The difficulty, the intense difficulty, of the contemporary novelist is to form an adequate conception of life at this moment when everything is changing. He must know, that is, feel so much, and on so many levels. And he must be able to draw back far enough to see the whole movement in focus, not one aspect distorted out of all proportion to the whole. He sees that there are moments in the history of the human race when what is personal in a man is less important than the fears and hopes, the impulses, he shares with a great many of his fellows. He suspects that this is such a moment. And perhaps he despairs. He thinks: If I am to write about this movement, this change, it will dwarf any men and women I can conceive. It will de-personalise them. Or he chooses—as Day Lewis does in a novel called *The Starting Point*—characters which he hopes will convey by their actions the heights and depths, the terrific disruptive nature of the change. But to do that they would have to be of heroic size—of the size of Lenin, or Krupp. They would have to become the vehicle of impersonal forces while remaining men—like Ulen-spiegel in Charles de Coster's great novel. The characters of *The Starting Point* have not this more

than personal significance. It is perhaps impossible for any contemporary novelist to draw far enough back from what is happening to see it clearly. Clearly enough to recreate it in fiction. If this is so, then the novelist is *defeated* by his times in the widest possible sense of the word. Or perhaps he is defeated by something in human nature. Conceive a novelist with enough mental energy to create a Lenin or a Mussolini. Would he have also the coldness to stand above the battle, collecting and directing his energies into a modern *War and Peace*? I don't know. All one can say is that no such novelist is writing. Unless, when or before his novel is finished, we see that Jules Romains has done it: he is without question a very great novelist; and *Men of Good Will* is, even at this unfinished stage, the largest novel of our time. Or Arnold Zweig. In *Education Before Verdun*, *Sergeant Grischa*, and *The Crowning of a King*, he is working at a degree of imaginative heat which the French writer does not, in any single volume, equal or approach.

The inadequacy of the modern novel to tell us as much as we want to know about the contemporary scene is felt by readers as sharply as by the novelists themselves. So you get the enormous popularity of contemporary memoirs and autobiography, and such books as John Gunther's *Inside Europe*. It is not a weak curiosity but

a vital one which sends people to these books. They hope indeed to enlarge their consciousness by reading them. To feed an appetite which the novel is starving.

Writers have made two false starts—I think they are false—towards a new attitude to life. Take the Surrealists first. It is difficult to give an account in purely intellectual terms of a method—using the word in its widest sense—of writing, which involves a repudiation of the intellect. Or tries to dodge it. Fortunately, Surrealists don't mind explaining and expounding themselves, in rational language. They contradict each other, but one gathers uncertainly that the Surrealist writer tries to find a method of releasing in himself that level of his consciousness which he knows to be the source of inspiration—his subconscious. He wants—to quote Mr. Herbert Read quoting Max Ernst—to break down the barriers between the conscious and the unconscious, so that they will ‘meet and mingle and dominate the whole of life.’ The Surrealist attitude towards his unconscious is a humble one. He waits on his knees. He generally expresses it with fearful arrogance and defiance, reminding one of a Surrealist image which I read somewhere—‘the strident cry of red eggs.’

Many writers and artists are very unpleasant outside their creative work. They must be judged by their work, and in the case of the Surrealists, by

their theories. One aspect of Surrealist theory is entirely respectable and not new. That the artist draws his inspiration from something other than his conscious mind is beyond question. Has anyone ever questioned it? Thus an intelligent and sensitive critic, Mr. Herbert Read, can say: 'Art is more than description or reportage; it is an act of renewal. It renews vision, it renews language; but most essentially it renews life itself by enlarging the sensibility, by making men more conscious of the terror and beauty, the wonder of the possible forms of being.' (*Surrealism*: 1936.) This is as excellent an account of the creative arts as you could wish for, and an orthodox one.

But he goes on to say something else: '... though poets and painters in all ages have clung to a belief in the inspirational and even the obsessional nature of their gifts, repudiating in deeds if not in words the rigid bonds of classical theory, it is only now, with the aid of modern dialectics and modern psychology, in the name of Marx and Freud, that they have found themselves in a position to put their beliefs on a scientific basis, thereby initiating a continuous and deliberate creative activity whose only laws are the laws of its own dynamics.' (*Ibid.*) This says something quite different. It says that with the sanction of Freudian research and the method of thought known as dialectical materialism the artist—writer or painter—has found a new way

to reach and use inspiration. Elsewhere he says: 'Perhaps for the first time in history the artist has become conscious of the springs of his inspiration, is in conscious control of such inspiration. . . .' (*Art and Society*.) This, though I doubt if it means much, is plain enough. But he adds in a footnote: 'The paradox of such conscious control being that its aim is to circumvent the intellect, the normal instrument of conscious control.' We are left bewildered in front of a process which can only be described as the intellect circumventing itself.

Other and less intelligent, but more actively practising Surrealists have given other definitions.

' . . . we know that the surrealist text is a complete submission to the automatism of thought, that the spirit hears its own unconscious voice and that the poet transcribes without the intervention of the controlling reason.' (Georges Huguet in *Surrealism: 1936*.)

Distrust a movement that begins by asking the intellect to circumvent itself. A writer lives in intimate contact with that vast store of feelings, words, images, which we call the unconscious. The great writer penetrates farther, moves about more boldly in it, than his inferiors can do. His degree of success as a writer is the degree to which he contrives to disengage himself from this mass of raw material, to draw back from it, so that he is

able to realise, and present in a coherent and intelligible form, the complex tissue of feelings, emotions, thoughts, stirred in him by a particular occasion. By relating a number of feelings to one another, by concentrating a great many experiences into one, he gives a new form and substance to vast tracts of our common human experience. This involves exerting an even greater degree of attention. Becoming more critical, more and more passionately attentive, not more automatic. And this is true even although part of the process we call 'exerting attention' takes place unconsciously. There is an unconscious and a conscious attention at work. Both are part of the same creative impulse; both are essential to writing a novel.

There is already a body of Surrealist literature, in which you can judge what happens when you assist the subconscious to circumvent the intellect. Here is a short poem by one of the better-known French Surrealists, Benjamin Perét. It is called *Honest Folk*.

The quarrel between the boiled chicken and the ventriloquist

had for us the meaning of a cloud of dust
which passed above the city
like the blowing of a trumpet
It blew so hard that its bowler hat was trembling
and its beard stood up on end
to bite off its nose

It blew so loudly
that its nose cracked open like a nut
and the nut spat out
into the far distance
a little cow-shed
wherein the youngest calf
was selling its mother's milk
in sausage-skin flasks
that its father had vulcanised.

It's very odd how silly the French, who are the most civilised and intelligent people in the world, can be. But this sort of thing is worse than silly, it's spurious. Far from holding out hopes of a revival, a literary renascence, Surrealism in literature shows every symptom of cultural decay: a shallow sophistication taking the place of maturity, ingenuity in place of a serious purpose, stridency—the strident cry of red eggs, surrender to personal emotions, diffuseness, a laboured and boring self-consciousness.

The other false start is the proletarian novel—so-called. Perhaps it would be truer to say of it not that it hasn't started properly, but that it doesn't exist. There is nothing to which we can point and say: 'This expresses a new mode of feeling, a new attitude.' There are novels about working-class life, good, bad, and indifferent. In all but the inessential details they are exactly like novels about middle-class life. No novelist has

yet succeeded in giving form and a voice to the passion—I am using the word in its scriptural sense—of the worker. Perhaps we are waiting for this novelist to be born. It is possible that he will be born on the dole. It is not so likely that he will be able to write on it.

He must have in himself access not simply to the life of the anonymous worker, at its deepest and least apprehensible level, but the energy to transfer it into words, into the events and characters of a novel. You need not expect this energy in a factory-hand or a dole-fed unemployed man or woman. A novelist born and living in the conditions of another class, without the sensibility to touch reality at the point where it touches the worker, had better not sink his shafts at this spot. Nor is it of the first importance that he should. What is more important for him is that he should wrestle faithfully and ceaselessly with the life of his age until he knows what is essential in it, what is living and what is dead and done-for. When he knows this he can give the things he is able to write about a significance they owe to being a part, vivid and undistorted, of a larger world.

This is perhaps the way out for the modern novelist. If he cannot deal with the whole contemporary scene he can take soundings of it. If, let us say, he describes the life of a German refugee in Paris he can tell us what, in 1937, is happening

to human dignity. Or he can take some actual concrete instance from contemporary life—say, a mining village in a ruined area—and write about it in such a way that it breaks into our minds. He can only do this if he realises that his own feelings are not of the faintest importance. That he was shocked, or surprised, or indignant matters as little as if he lost his hat. Less. Perhaps he watches a poor woman, the wife of an unemployed man, giving some little extra food she has got to her half-fed child. He is seized with pity, with rage. He says so, and at once the image of the mother is obscured. The pity, you see, is in the act. Not in what the novelist feels about it. He should feel only an intense anxiety to convey just that gesture, that tone in her voice, that look, of pride and fearfulness, on her face; and as he keeps the image held firmly in his mind a great many feelings will attach themselves to it—feelings which belong perhaps to his own childish memories. His already intense emotion becomes more intense; deeper and wider. It forces him to choose the right words, words that will throw the scene into such relief that it blazes with light. A great writer perhaps has some inborn capacity for detaching himself from his experience. Those of us who are only talented are always falling into the temptation of thinking that our personal emotions, especially when they are intense, are valuable for their own

sake. And most of us write too much and too fast—we are too busy earning a living—to learn this painful discipline which the great writer learns easily.

An intelligent critic has said that the novel, as a form, is finished. I don't accept this. I do accept that there has been, during the present century, a cultural decline—the causes are social and economic—which affects the novel as sharply as every other literary form. An intelligent reader, looking at the year's novels, has some excuse for believing that the novel has become a form of self-indulgence, a drug which injects its readers with false easy emotions and an attitude to life based on the most meagre kind of experience. Besides this, it has become increasingly difficult for the serious novelist to live on what he earns by writing novels. This is not entirely because of the competition of the standardised type of fiction. The intense effort to grasp what, in 1937, is happening to human beings—in the world outside them and in their own minds and hearts—demands time, willingness to travel, mentally if not physically, until you come to the place where a new life is being born. None of this is easy. If it means success of one kind it may mean failure in another. Failure, poverty, and what is worse, not being heard. I am not now talking about genius—though genius itself can be killed or at least deformed by being born at the

wrong time or the wrong place. A genius has no more brains than another man to be shot out of him. And no fewer needs. During the last ten years of his life D. H. Lawrence wrote too much and too quickly—he had his living to earn. But I am talking about the talented and intelligent writer who can take hold of the spirit of his age only by a persistent struggle with it. His inner sight has to be sharpened. He has to work hard for his vision. If the contemporary novel is to be saved and regenerated certain things are required of novelists—especially of the young ones. The rest of us are probably past hope.

How is the novelist to break through to the new reality, the new consciousness of reality? A discipline, a double discipline, is needed. He must make a willing and passionate surrender to experience—to the point of extinction of his personal life—so that he may become more sensitive, more susceptible to an always widening range of emotional experience. And he must practise an absolute faithfulness in turning emotion into words. The situation, the sequence of events, the characters, that are to carry the emotion must not be artificially blown out by pumping into them feelings which the novelist thinks ought to belong there.

Where is he to look for these events, these characters, if—for the reasons we have examined—he cannot attempt to get into a novel those anonym-

mous masses, moved by almost inarticulate passions and desires, which, more than any individual, express the reality of the contemporary scene? (Unless it were a gigantic and legendary figure like Ulenspiegel, 'the great Beggar'.) He must thrust his knife to come in as near the bone of reality as he can. Birth, death, the relations of men and women, are part of the social complex at the same time as they are common and at home with us. When a writer examines the social complex he is revolted by a great many things. He is usually eager to say so, which is a mistake. He may, he *must* revolt against hypocrisy, worn-out conventions, injustice, cruelty. But if he is going to write about them as a novelist he should remember that his emotions are not interesting because he feels them. The more deeply he has felt, the harder he must work to detach himself. To present not himself—not his raw personal emotions and reflections, nor the images latent in his unconscious—but the thing observed.

We often speak as though novels were composed of characters and plot. What they are composed of is words. To regenerate the novel means regenerating the language. Here is a sentence by a serious and thoughtful modern novelist. 'He made even this mob of posh young men look gauche and uncouth, as though one saw a fragile, perfect statuette walking through a field of prize cattle.'

Now, without reading the whole book, that sentence is enough to warn us that the character described in these words is much less interesting and significant than the author wants to make us believe. The slovenly wording, and the use of a clumsy inexpressive metaphor, are sufficient evidence that the writer's thoughts were confused and his feeling poor and thin. Alert and sensitive feelings would have warned him that a statuette walking through a field would look far more out of place—'gauche and uncouth'—than the cattle. If we are going to have a new attitude to life we need to look very carefully at the words we use. We need words that are things. And new and unexpected combinations of words to bring out the meaning—as sharply as it is brought out in a documentary film by the choice of significant detail and the angle from which the picture is made.

A passage in a new novel—*The World Ends*, by William Lamb—says much of what I want to say. [The only salvation for literature is to go back to the beginning.] No descriptions of scenery—except when it is necessary to explain that there was no water in the hills and the men were dropping off from thirst, or that in the pass one machine-gun could hold up all the troops a murderous government was able to send. Or you may say that the sea was cruel or as cold as ice—or that a girl's eyes are "like the eyes of a kitten." But that's all.

The stories themselves must be honest passionate accounts of a man's conflict with danger, cruelty, injustice, and the earth itself. Nothing else is worth discovering. Nothing else matters. I don't want to read one more novel in which the characters wallow in money and false emotions—wax models—commonplace sentimental young women imagining themselves ironical—or in which everything real is sacrificed to the "brilliant atmosphere", or smothered in "charming descriptions of the country Mr. Spatterdash knows so well, etc." They make me ashamed. I want to tear off atmosphere and all the rest of it, like pulling the clothes off a sick man to see what's the matter with him.'

There are no short cuts to the regeneration of a language. No tricks are any use. Here is a quotation from another recent novel. The writer is trying to convey a man's disturbed state of mind.

'... walking towards the library he was thinking
glad
sad
glad
sad
glad

sad glad sad glad sad glad glad sad glad
sad glad sad glad sad gladsadgladsadgladsadgladsad
gladsad, without truly finding out which he was.'

This method is completely indefensible. You might say that it is the pointillist method of painting

applied to writing. But pointillism in painting depends on depths of light, and on the placing and composing of colours and forms. There are in writing no *visual* depths, and in writing of this sort there are no aural depths either. It is possible to produce an effect of depth by merely aural means—by the arrangement of vowel sounds. But this makes sound the determining factor in writing, a thing not defensible in prose. Sound cannot be the determining cause in poetry, either: a poet's words are given to him at some level of his consciousness on which the sound is itself determined by the emotion.

New senses, a new conception of life, new feelings, demand a perpetual search for words and phrases not rubbed thin by misuse or vulgarised by advertisement-writers. We need a literature in closer touch with the language of non-literary activities. When the wife of an unemployed seaman says to me: 'By Thursday I'm ashore for food', she is using an image as vivid, as living, as any in Shakespeare. We need to find these images. If we cannot regenerate the novel—because the task is impossible or too difficult for us—we can keep the language alive for the novelist to whom it will be natural to think in a new way. In the meantime only those novelists are worth troubling about who are trying to become more aware of what is happening to us. Trying to convey their know-

ledge with the greatest possible exactness and emotional relevance. Trying, as Lawrence said, 'to lead into new places the flow of our sympathetic consciousness.' The others are dead, and it seems a pity that they are not buried.

1937.

I shall not say anything about this.

Fragment of an (Unwritten) Autobiography

I NEVER wanted to write.

This is partly true. From one cause and another—but chiefly because I had a hard time to get myself to a university—I didn't, when I was very young, think of writing. Once only, when I was at school, it had occurred to me that I might become a poet. I wrote about two hundred lines of a long poem in the metre of *Hyperion*. I can remember nothing about it except that the last word was '*Renunciation*.' After that, I suppose, it became too difficult. About ten years ago I found a fair copy of it in a drawer and destroyed it.

At the university I wrote a thesis on Blake: about eighty thousand words. Most of it was written during the summer vacation in Leeds, in the admirable public library which contained, beside books on Blake, Ellis and Yeats's large edition of the *Works*. I remember that it was a very hot summer. In the last week of the vacation I made a fair copy of it at home, in Whitby, writing all night the last two nights. My mother understood

so well the need for this forced march that she got me green tea, with which I kept myself awake.

As I remember it, that thesis was abominably written, in immense involved sentences. I had no notion how to write.

I kept this, my first 'work', for several years. The typescript was read by a few persons besides the university authorities. J. G. Wilson the bookseller was one of these, and it is in my mind that he showed it to a publisher. He had—has—an enthusiastic kindness for young writers. The original copy, corrected and interlined, lived in the corner of a shelf in the dining-room of my first house, exactly behind the coalbox. It became terribly dusty. When did I destroy it and the typed copy? *Did* I destroy them, or were they lost somewhere? I have no recollection. Certainly they vanished years ago.

My ambition during this time was to be a don. I worked and hoped for this. But in the end, when I had taken a very good degree, no encouragement was forthcoming from the only quarter where it could come from. At the time I put this down to my being a young woman, but doubtless there were other very good reasons, not obvious to me. I would not allow myself to feel disappointed, or even to think about it. I took the research scholarship offered to me and wrote another thesis—on modern European drama this time. I don't know

whether anyone told me to write in short sentences this time. I am inclined to think I came to it myself—the first time my mind took a step on its own.

In April, 1914, I was living in Kettering. My book on drama had been packed off to the university and I knew I should be rewarded for it with—another degree. It was meagre comfort for the moment. I saw no future for myself and my hopes. Not that I admitted to myself even now that I had been passed over by the authorities who might have noticed me. My mind ignored all that. It behaved like a newly-trapped wild animal. A furious undirected energy possessed it. Looking back, I see myself as a harmless young fool. But I daresay I was an intolerably restless companion. I did not know what to do or which way to turn to escape. I hated Kettering, and quoted with pleasure a line (of Belloc's?) about the Midlands being 'sodden and unkind'.

It was unjust. This spring, the last of the old world, the hawthorn was the finest I ever saw it; the hedges were an unbroken wave of white blossom, miraculous.

Since there was nothing else I could do I began to write a novel. With my first sight of Kettering I had made a vow not to stay there a day longer than I must. I refused to look for a house to live in. Even then I had an instinctive horror of

possessions—an instinct I have ignored to my cost. So, we lived in a small commercial hotel. No one else *lived* in it. No one except me would have dreamed of doing so. We had a dingy small sitting-room of our own. I had a perpetual grudge against the landlady for mixing potato peelings with the coal she allowed me. I suppose she did it to damp down the fire, but the smell was insidious and abominable. I daren't complain. We paid so little, and we had with difficulty persuaded her to take us.

With my large ideas of what is barely necessary for living on a salary of less than fifty shillings a week, I took out a subscription to the Times Book Club. I had time, during the long days, for plenty of reading and, as well, for the first time I could read without a thesis in view. Everything I read stirred a little the ferment in my mind. Novels scarcely interested me. I got out one after another the volumes of J. A. Symonds's *History of the Renaissance in Italy* and lived in it with an indescribable excitement and pleasure. What value the book has as a work of scholarship I don't know, but I owe it a debt I shall never pay in my turn. If at this minute some young shabby girl, baffled by her life, is recovering it in a book, it is little likely to be one of mine.

With so much reading, and with days when I was too restless to read, let alone write, my first

novel went slowly. I try to remember the mood in which I began it. What did I think to do? Certainly I was not interested in telling a story. Nor, very much, in characters. A large exercise book survives (because it is still in use) from this time, and contains two and a half pages of scattered notes I made for it. They follow no plan. Most of them are now meaningless. What can one make of this? ‘A Lucretian millionaire, exploiting men and their atoms.’ Or this? ‘Progress. Karl Marx. Fabians. Mrs. Webb to tea. Cloven hoof.’ Three incidents are noted in a few lines, and there are even briefer ideas for characters. I notice an odd thing about these. They are none of them men and women so much as embodied ideas. A number of the notes concern the ideas that possessed me then, in 1914. ‘Coming struggle. Back to caste tradition. Chaos instead of order. No roots (even reformers have no roots).’

Nothing would induce me to open the novel itself, to see how many of these lightly scrawled notes took form in it. What is clear is that Nature felt no more eager to make a novelist of me than the university authorities to make me a don. No plot, only disjointed scenes. No characters, only dry bones in the valley of my mind—the *ideas* collected in years of ill-directed reading, borrowed from the *New Age*, remembered from students’ talk. There is a single exception to make to this.

One breath of life blew into the manuscript from heaven knows where. For one moment my mind shook off its preoccupation with other people's thoughts, and made an irresponsible gesture towards freedom. I'll remember this later.

The War broke out. I moved to Liverpool, and the trap I had been evading closed on me. I took a house and became its servant. I never do anything by halves. Hating domesticity I was a far more efficient housewife than any I have been able to employ. I can't write or read in an untidy room. The second half of my novel was written in the intervals of scrubbing, cooking, washing up, shopping. It was still not finished when my son was born in the middle of 1915, in Whitby.

After this it gathered dust in a corner of the shelf for five months. In December I went to Whitby again with my baby—and my manuscript, pushed into our suitcase at the last minute. I should have time there, I thought, to write. The War was killing my friends and making everything uncertain, but my mind and body were too young not to think of the future with hope for myself.

*'My Spectre around me night and day,
Like a Wild beast guards my way. . . .'*

My Spectre was a mind, ambitions, that gave me no rest.

In Whitby my six-months'-old son caught whooping-cough from my sister. He took it mildly, but he woke up and coughed at night. I burned vapo-cresolene in our room, over a night-light. One night I was kneeling on the floor, resting my paper on the edge of a chair in the feeble tiny ring of light round the night-light. Part of my mind was at the door of my ear, listening for the first sign of restlessness from the cot. Suddenly a person, imagined and real, broke into my mind like a thief. A disreputable little man, with a round bristling face, called Poskett. At first sight I knew all about him. I knew he had had trouble with his wife—and no wonder. I knew his weaknesses, his shocking habits, his one endearing virtue. I crouched, scribbling like a maniac, foolishly smiling. My cheeks burned. The child in the cot woke up, coughed and was sick: I made him comfortable and went back to Poskett, who, for that matter, had never been out of my thoughts. I wrote until stiffness in my knees, cramp in my wrist, and the cold, drove me shivering into bed.

Only a fraction of what at that time I knew about him went into the book. It never occurred to me that this fraction was the only touch of reality in the whole preposterous thing. No one told me so. I don't think a reviewer noticed him. A pity.

I didn't finish the book during this time. But I wrote some verses for it on the lasting passion of my life (Whitby). One evening the electric light flickered out and on three times, and finally stayed out, which was the signal for the Zeppelins. In the darkness, I found a piece of paper and sat on the floor with my back against the leg of the table, to catch a little light from the candle my Mother set near her chair. The 'poem' was finished just when the light came on again, and I read it to my Mother. She admired it very much. Exhilarated, I said: 'The poetess will now get supper ready.' 'Poetess indeed,' she said kindly. I half thought I was one.

I finished the novel some time during 1916. I don't remember much about this time, except that I was always too busy and often now too tired to write. I used to think about it sometimes when I was wheeling my son out. Inside the front cover of the exercise book I wrote down phrases that occurred to me. I had begun to do this in Kettering. I don't think many came to me now. It was finished at last, and I made a typed copy of it, working away with two fingers on a rickety machine we had scrounged. This took a good time.

When I left Liverpool for good in the spring of 1917 the typescript went with me. It had already been rejected by one publisher—Duck-

worth, I think. From Reading I posted it to another. For the time being I wrote nothing more. Novel-writing really did not interest me much. I waited to see what would happen to this one.

Mr. Fisher Unwin sent for me to go and see him. I made outwardly calm inwardly nervous preparations for the interview. I saw his Reader first, who talked to me very kindly. Did he tell me to throw this novel away? I don't think so. He couldn't have realised how impenetrable my self-confidence was to kindness. Then I saw Mr. Unwin himself, in one of those lovely Adelphi rooms for which our latter-day barbarians have no use. After some talk he suggested that I might care to offer him, say, my next six novels. If he had said 'the next one', I might have agreed on a rather one-sided bargain, but the notion that I might go on writing novel after novel alarmed me, and I got up to go. Charmingly polite to an uncouth young woman, he accompanied me to the door and put in my hand a copy of *The Way of an Eagle*.

'I'll give you this,' he said kindly. 'Read it, and see how a novel ought to be written.'

The manuscript—I left with it under my arm—went somewhere else. Where? I have forgotten. It came back. I sent it out again, from a Hampshire village this time, to Constable.

Surely I must have kept, at least for some

months or years, the letter Constable wrote saying that they were interested in it and would like to see the author. It has vanished now. With the self-doubt which lies deeper in me than my confidence—but not deeper than a blind obstinacy—I didn't assume that they were willing to publish the book. I wrote and asked them if that was what they meant. If it was not, I didn't mean to spend train fare on another journey, and perhaps be given a copy of another best-seller to study.

Their answer still left a faint doubt in my mind. I imagined, too, that when they knew that the author was a young woman they would think less of the book. I sent my husband up to interview them, and to pose as Storm Jameson. I might just as well have gone myself. The junior partner in the firm was a young man called Michael Sadleir. He easily persuaded the truth out of the other young man. I suppose I was pleased when I knew certainly that my book was going to be published. I have forgotten. But I am sure I took it coolly. I never give myself away. Nor expect much good. But I must, for a time, have felt a little safer.

My memory, that japer, has kept a small distinct picture of myself crossing the sitting-room of Michael Sadleir's London house. In the picture the room is a mile long and to all intents and purposes I cross it on my hands and knees. After dinner I went through the manuscript and drew

my pencil through passages he said were silly and must come out. My half-realised contempt for novel-writing made this easy to do. He knocked four words off the title. I had called it *The Pot Boils and the Scum Rises*.

Some weeks later, after the contract was signed, I had pressing need of money. There was nothing new about this state of things, but I had a new idea for dealing with it. I wrote to Constable and asked them for a little money. I had a dim notion that this was an outrage. But, I said to myself, they have got my book, which is worth something. I was far from supposing that it was less an asset to the firm than a liability.

Anybody who believes that publishers—except one or two perhaps—are not gentle-hearted good men must drop his head for shame. They sent me ten pounds. It meant, of course, that their losses were ten pounds heavier than they would have been.

The novel was published early in 1919. Trying to feel my way back to what must have been a time, however short, of excitement and expectancy, I can recall nothing. Nothing at all of the feelings of an obscure young woman. I remember that I saw no one during the early days whom I could speak to about it. I don't suppose I minded that. It wouldn't have suited me to show much interest, or to be eyed.

In my ignorance I was not surprised that it had a great many reviews. I don't think it was much praised, but it was taken seriously. On Michael Sadleir's advice I had sent a guinea to a press-cutting agency. I kept every review, bad and good; and kept them for a long time, too. Four or five years. But I destroy everything in time—letters, reviews, all that. Nowadays I get rid of them very quickly—at once. I won't leave a wrack of papers behind when I die. I want, when I die, to clear off without a trace. *Spurlos versenkt.* Nor do I care to drag about with me while I am alive a growing burden of documents from my past. Go, go, I say, tearing up letters the moment I have answered them, tearing up my notes for a book, rejecting mementoes, rubbing out where I can every mark of myself on this earth I shall leave with such bitter anguish.

I should like to be able to destroy every copy of *The Pot Boils*, wherever it is. It is, I'm happy to know, not in the ordinary way to be bought. The copyright is mine, too, and it can never be reprinted, even if there were a competition for Worst Novels. It was an unbelievably bad book, though perhaps not the worst I have written. Its singular badness proves that I was not a born novelist, but I think it has another lesson for the young writer—and that is the importance he should attach to being born into a literary or literary-

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overcrowded to a degree that he is lucky if he is not suffocated in the first few minutes. If he is noticed he can hope for thoughtful useful criticism from, at most, two or three quarters. The rest will be no use to him. The weekly reviews will not notice him at all, unless he has laid his lines beforehand to bring them in.

The undeniable overcrowding is most serious for an unfriended writer. His best hope is to make friends in the right places quickly. This if he is sensitive is a waste of energy and spirit, but it may—I don't say that it will—save him from wasting his time working with care and passion at a novel only to hear a few careless words thrown after it as it sinks for the last time. A society on the point of dying of its vulgarity is no nursery for a young serious writer. In this sense, as in some others, his lot is harder than mine was in 1919. For money it could scarcely be harder. Ten pounds for more than three years' work. And that not earned.

I regret still that I did not become a don.

Postscript.

The few, the very few, documents I do not destroy include the contracts for my books. I have them all, neatly clipped with a rubber band. A minute ago I had the curiosity to look in the envelope marked 'Constable. *The Pot Boils*'. I

have found a paper which would certainly have been destroyed if it had not hidden itself there all these years—the Report of Duckworth's anonymous reader on the book. I wonder how I came by it. Did I ask them for it? I was innocent enough to have done that.

He wrote: ‘This is a distinctly clever tract, gibing at the young intellectuals who “take up” social reform. It is not so much satire as irony, and it is a difficult book to place. Amid much cleverness and insight, there are streaks of self-conscious smartness and labouring of the point. Still, I think it is worth some attention.

‘It is loosely constructed; starts nowhere; ends nowhere; tries apparently to follow the French mode of throwing in jabs of light on a given situation from many angles. Each chapter introduces new characters, who reappear at odd moments; and the characters are so many and so ill-defined that the reader becomes confused in sorting them out. They do not live; they are just vehicles for the author’s theories and the expounding of his theme.

‘There is no plot. The book just rambles round the thoughts, ideals and struggles of a group of young people from a northern university; their dissatisfaction with life as it is; their forlorn miseries over things that don’t matter.

I think it should be considered, though hardly

for immediate publication. If this is a first book, it shows considerable promise, and the author would in any case I think be worth encouraging for his next book. There would hardly be much in this book, but the man can write and is worth watching.'

'The man' could *not* write. Being denied other uses for his mind he fell into the habit of writing. A pity.

September 1938.

